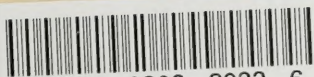


"Ashes of Incense"

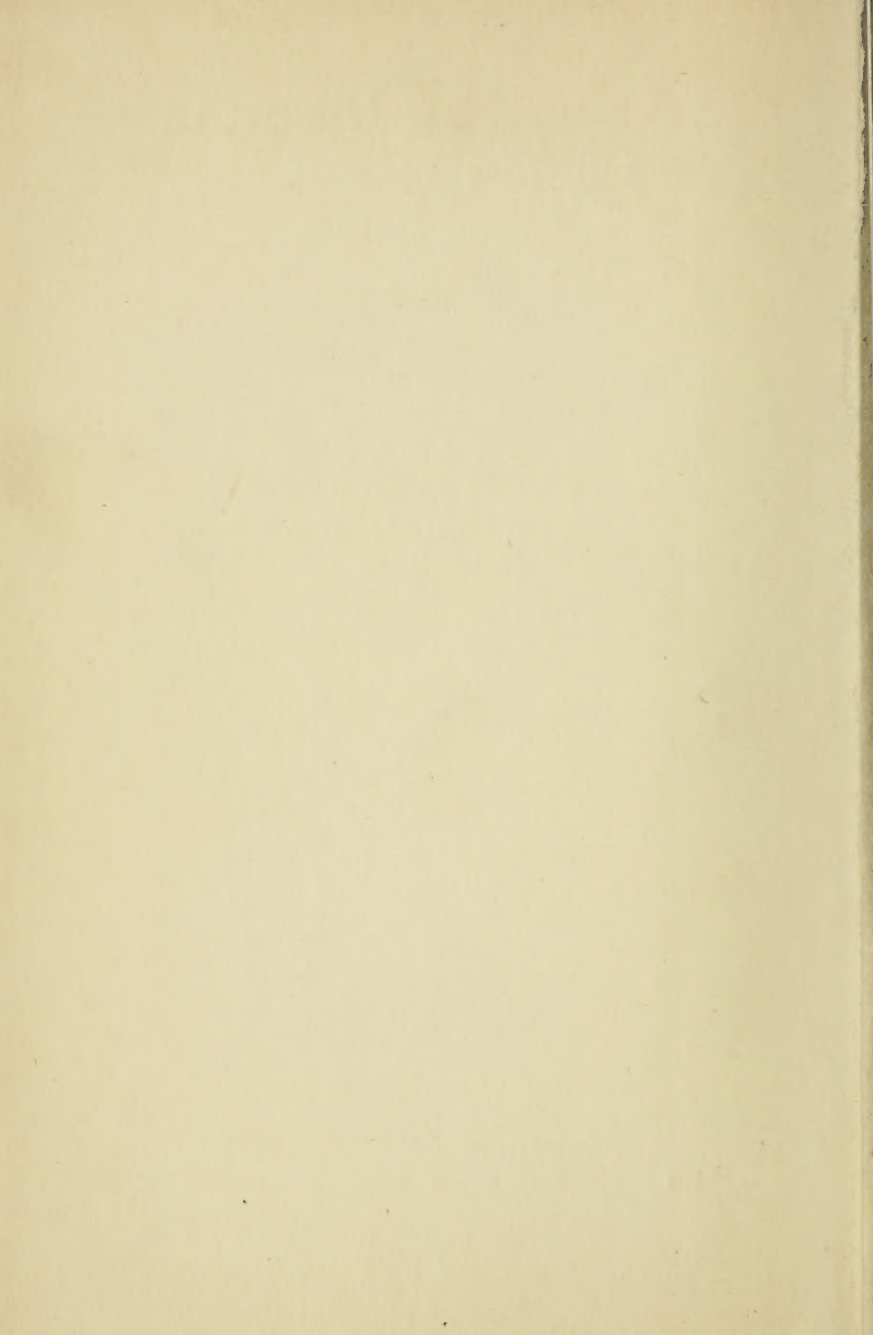


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Ashes of Incense

A NOVEL

BY THE AUTHOR OF
MASTERING FLAME



New York & London
MITCHELL KENNERLEY

1912

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PROLOGUE

A VERY tiny person, atop a very tall ladder, by help of which two mites of hands could just reach the highest shelf in the preserve closet; out of a marvellous fluff of pale gold hair, two angelic eyes that gaze—or are they blue after all? Perhaps the pinafore lends—at any rate, what matter? Blue or not, the round upturned eyes are full of that divine emptiness we call innocence; breathe, too, the repose of undisturbed deliberation, as they rest contemplatively on the long row of brown jars, stretched in sedate invitation along the highest shelf. The tiny person sighs: there are a great many of them. Then, resolutely, out of the pinafore pocket she draws a spoon, and a quaint old rusty knife; takes down each fat brown jar and pries the top off, then sighs again—as the two dozen cylinders of sweeties lie before her, opened—waiting. In the half light of the narrow closet, the wee person looks just a ball of blue and fluff, as she curls into comfort, there on the topmost rung of the

ladder, and begins: to eat jam, very slowly—very accurately. At the foot of the ladder another ball of fluff curls down into itself—with a watchful blink of its pale grey eyes. For a time—half an hour almost—there is silence.

Then, "I've finished, Simon," calls a little voice—so infinitely soft that one involuntarily imagines a purr; "it was very *sweet*, but I've finished. I've eaten just exactly the same out of every jar, so that they can have no idea whether I really did eat it, or whether Cook didn't fill the jars quite to the top. I don't like jam, Simon"—as she talked, the tiny person was coming down the ladder, paying great attention to her shiny patent leather shoes—"I don't like the sticky, sweet stuff! But oh, Simon!"—safe down, she caught up the other ball of blue—not close to her, but holding it far enough to look into the pale grey eyes that blinked back understandingly—"won't it be delicious when they find out!—when they don't find out, I mean. Isn't it delicious to puzzle the wits of those big people, Simon? Such stupid big people!" And with a soft little chuckle, she moved the ladder back into its place and stole out; her baby face adorable in its guilelessness. Simon stole after her.

I

THROUGH all the villa there was that breathlessness of extreme heat. A fountain plashed somewhere, patiently, but the stillness silenced it; turned it to no account. And in a spacious north-east room above the garden, a small figure lying on a white *chaise-longue*, stretched itself wearily—yawned, and sighed.

"Life is very dull, Simon," murmured a little voice musingly; "three years of a clever husband are maddeningly same. You are there, Simon?—ah, *mais bien sur!* In the coolest corner of the window, *non?* Come here then—yes, come! We're so bored, we must talk to some one, I suppose."

As the great cat that had been stretched beside the window rose slowly and came stalking toward the *chaise-longue*, the small person extended therein sat up, yawned again, and made room. "Yes, there—there you are. Now we shall have half an hour before N'ala brings the tea. Don't

you think time is funny, Simon? The way the very terms of it are lies? I said three years with a clever husband, didn't I? *Mon Dieu!* I was being what these people with consciences call accurate. Three years—I've been in this place, with Michael, three lives, *mon beau petit*. Since I came to Algiers, as a bride (a little pause broke the soft murmuring voice), you tell me it has been only three years? Ah, *non!* Not with Michael Sargent!—not with a clever person. I tell you, my cabbage, to have to live with a husband and a clever person all in one——! The calendar says lies. At the same time we have been amused, eh, Simon? Playing jokes with Michael—playing jokes with Michael's conscience, till we've almost worn it to pieces, playing,—that has not been so bad. And Algiers is not so mean a place; we have been amused. Then Michael bought this palace, this real Arab house in the old part of the town—it *is* an Arab house still, though he tacked a garden on to it and calls it a villa. It is better—ah, heavens, yes!—than that ghastly America, and *Boston!* I could not have enjoyed unmaking Michael in Boston. I wonder (the small person's elbow quirked itself to rest her cloudy gold head)—I wonder what would have happened to us, if papa had not died,

and all the aunts, that winter of diphtheria in Marseilles? I wonder what would have happened had they not all died, and I—the small Dorofée of eighteen—gone to America as *gouvernante* with that unresisting Mrs. Pless? Surely I should never have met Michael; never have—how funny it was!—fancied myself what they call in love with him, so that I put aside all my strange, fantastic dreams of life—brain dreams, all of them—to belong to him. As I did belong to him, yes! For that one short year; and surely, he would never have quarrelled with his family for marrying me, and in consequence left his adored Boston to live in Algiers! But what then? One would simply have known other dull, dull clever people. One would have amused oneself tweaking their ideas about, as now I tweak Michael's. It would have been quite the same, finally; only there would have been no Arabs. And that I should have regretted. So would you, Simon: you like Arabs."

Simon looked up from nonchalantly licking one slender paw. His eyes were the pale inscrutable grey—I was about to say, of the lady's own. But I forget; people said she had blue eyes—the grey of slate then, but of liquid slate. Nothing was written in them, except concealment.

"Michael will be coming in soon," went on

the small Dorofée, always looking at the cat from a distance—the distance to where it lay near, but not touching, her tiny feet. “He went to play tennis—would you not know he was an American? Tennis in Algiers, in July!—and soon he will come back, all hot and blowsy, and tell me what a game Mrs. Templewaite plays! Poor clever Michael—Mrs. Templewaite! And then he will add that we are invited to dine with the Templewaites at the *Prince George*, and haven’t I something besides those dimity things? Something a—er—a bit more *recherché*? Oh la, la! this poor Michael, eh, Simon? A simple receptive animal; but”—she jumped up with a sudden access of vigour—“scarcely an intelligence.”

Simon stayed exactly where he was, on the end of the *chaise-longue*. His grey eyes, half closed, knew quite well what was going on. That bit of gold and blue and rose-leaves that was his mistress, was standing before the dressing-table, letting down her hair. The dressing-table, like all the rest of the room, was draped in fluffy, fluted organdie, with a coquetry of pale blue ribbons running in and out; the chairs in the room were of white fretted wood, and the bed; and on the floor were pale blue rugs with corner knots of frivolous pink rosebuds. Yes, Simon knew it all,

well enough. Knew the gay shepherdesses on the French mantel, the ivory brushes and boxes marked with an elaborate "Dolly;" and if anything, in the course of his nine lives, amused him, it was this room, and the things marked "Dolly."

To every one else the room seemed a masterpiece of the appropriate. "Just exactly the setting for dear, pretty, childish Dolly!" said Paula Templewaite. And every one agreed with her. Algiers was distinctly fond of "little Mrs. Sargent," as she was invariably called; "of course she was no match for Mr. Sargent—*so* clever, my dear, made a *fortune* in fruit last year, I'm told, and has written a most valuable book on the *Industries of Algeria*—yes, he's from Boston, but his people broke with him for marrying a governess, so he brought her out here. He was already interested in the fruit farms, I believe; and he bought a wonderful old palace, not on the hill of course, but a marvellous place, really, that he's turned into a villa; any way he's *quite* wealthy. And I'm very fond of her; sweet, you know, though perhaps—er—a little simple, dear Dolly."

Simple! Certainly Dorofée never looked more so than when once she overheard herself called that. And she was as popular with the English

and American colony of Algiers as only the people one can patronize are popular. Hostesses had fallen into the habit of saying, "Oh, yes, I've got Dolly Sargent to help me entertain—I thought it would be so nice for the little thing." Or, "I'll just ask little Dolly Sargent to do that—she's only twenty-two, so she ought not to mind a bit of work—especially as she used to be a governess." Paula Templewaite, in particular, undertook to show this form of kindly affection; the wife of a playwright, and herself a "prose-poetess" of no small distinction, Paula thought benevolently that she might do dear Dolly good. "Quicken her a bit, and that, you know," rather vaguely. Being tall and majestic and red-haired, it was to be supposed that Paula could *quicken*, where she set her mind to it. At the *Prince George Hotel*, where she and her husband lived, they said she could. She had lived there one whole winter, you see. There is not much to quicken in Algiers in summer, hence Paula's attention to Dorofée. And, subsequently, to Dorofée's husband. But I am turning somersaults with my story.

It was in Dorofée's frilly blue and white room that the tiny figure stood that afternoon, enveloped in a mist of pale gold hair; before Dorofée's mirror that a wee face regarded itself, with-

out smiling—a face so innocent, so ingenuous, so wholly and enchantingly childlike, that one missed the smile somehow, wondered why it did not come. I say 'one'—I mean only you and I; and Simon. No one else ever saw her without it. For a long minute she gazed at herself thus; then, with a sudden noiseless swiftness, picked up a brush and began leisurely to separate her hair. Some one was coming down the passage outside.

"Oh, it's you, Michael?" She dropped the brush, and went to meet him as he entered,—a tall, good-looking man, with glasses, apparently about thirty; of a nose that asserted intellect, which the rather full mouth strove to counter-balance.

"Yes. Had tea yet? I'll have mine in here, if you don't mind; coolest spot I've found to-day. I say, but it's hot outside!" He had dropped down on the *chaise-longue*, shoving Simon off on to the floor. The grey eyes looked back at him, impenetrably.

"I daresay it is hot." Dorofée had taken up her brush again. "And then you play such a swift game, Michael dear—so much keener than anybody else."

"Oh, well"—Michael smiled, mopping with his handkerchief—"can't let these Englishmen walk

away with everything, you know. Then Mrs. Templewaite plays a rattling game herself, Dolly."

"Oh! yes—Mrs. Templewaite. You played with her? How nice; you don't often play with her, do you, Michael dear? That was *very* nice. I haven't seen her for a long time; is she writing anything now—any more prose-poems?" Dorofée had gathered the shining cloud of gold into a soft babyish knot at the back of her neck. Her eyes as they sought her husband's were vaguely inquiring.

"Yes—that is she said she'd written one. She's going to read it to us to-night—oh, I forgot to tell you they want us to dine with them at the *Prince George* to-night. She's a *tremendously* clever woman, Mrs. Templewaite, Dolly."

"*Isn't* she?" echoed Dorofée, with the sweetest enthusiasm in the world. "I do admire her, Michael, and I'm so glad you have her to talk to a bit; I'm such a little stupid, myself, so far behind you in cleverness and everything, it——"

Michael laughed indulgently. "But of course you're behind me, you dear little kitten! What's a man for, if not brains? Here, come, sit down and kiss me—you're the most lovable baby in the

world,"—he drew her down beside him with an ardour that Dorofée (the Dorofée of these days, not of those when she had married Michael) found wholly unnecessary—"exactly the sort of wife a man wants. (Simon, over in the corner, ran his tongue along his whiskers till it looked as though he smiled.) But it will be nice to dine with them to-night, won't it?"

"*Very* nice," said Dorofée, her wide childish eyes on the remnant of Michael's collar. "You told her we'd come, I suppose?"

"Why, yes. I knew you'd nothing else planned, so——"

"Of course, Michael dear. And you were quite right, as you always are, you big, wise person. Don't I always want to do just what you do? And am I not perfectly happy to be anywhere that I can sit and listen to you talk, you clever boy?" The little hands were patting Michael's coat. "Now tell me, what shall I wear—my blue dimity?"

"Well—that is, if you've nothing else, Dolly. I wish though you'd get some—er—Liberties and things. Something a little more—ahem! *recherché*."

She smiled at him apologetically. "You know, dear, I would, only I'm not quite five feet, and

I'm really afraid that in satins I should look more of a baby than ever. They're more for tall people, you know, like Mrs. Templewaite."

Michael sighed. "Yes, I suppose they are. Well, the blue dimity then; only do put something in your hair, won't you? Amande (to a slim fair-skinned maid just entering with a tea-tray), see that madame has some jasmine from the garden, for this evening."

"*Oui, monsieur.*" The girl's back was turned, for the moment, as she arranged the tea-tray on a little tabouret; but Dorofée, sitting opposite the mirror, caught the reflection of the beautiful, sullen face.

"Come here, when you have finished, Amande," she ordered sweetly, at the same time putting both arms round Michael's neck. When the slender, haughty figure stood before them, "I think Amande looks bad, don't you, my husband?" asked Dorofée, carrying one of Michael's hands to her lips and kissing it. "She looks ill, and older. You must not work so hard, Amande. Let N'ala bring the tea, and care for *monsieur's* room, as I have told her. That is all. I merely wished *monsieur* to see how bad you look. You may go back to the kitchen now."

Catching another glimpse of the girl's face as

she left the room, Dorofée bit her lips—which was twitching a little. “I am afraid Amande is being worried by some intrigue,” she said, turning so that she got the light full on her husband’s face; “men make it so hard for these pretty half-caste girls, even *nice* men, they say. Still surely *we* don’t know any one who would be so disgusting, do we, Michael dear? We don’t know anybody who would make love to Amande?” Dorofée was straightening Michael’s glasses. She could see every quiver of his face.

“Why, no—no, Dolly, of course not.” He laughed uneasily. “How absurd—make love to Amande, any of our friends? My dear child, it’s quite too ridiculous.” He rose suddenly as though oppressed by something—perhaps by the fluttering hands that fondled his hair so persistently. “I’ll just go have a bath and change, Dolly. And—I wouldn’t worry Amande, I mean to say worry about her, you know. I—I think she looks very well, myself. *A bientôt*, Dolly.”

“*A bientôt*,” echoed Dorofée, kissing him clingingly before she let him go. Then, after the door had closed, “Ah, Simon, Simon,” she whispered ecstatically, “did you ever see anything so delicious, Simon? Being a woman without a con-

science—it is being a slave without fetters!" She sank down on the floor—the blue rose-budded floor—beside the cat, whose pale eyes were wide open.

"And think, think"—a small bundle of noiseless mirth, she rocked back and forth—"how I had to work for two years, to be able to sit there just now and tweak them about—funny puppets they were! You remember, Simon? How dead'y it was that first year, after—after, I suppose, what they call the wearing off had begun, with Michael a mass of 'sincerities' and 'duties'? How at last for sheer want of some humour in the case, I determined to unmake that pompous thing of his he calls a conscience? Oh, when I married him, I did not care—he might have had twenty consciences, I did not care! I put aside all that part of me that was different from him—my brain, that had always lived in itself, my brain gave up, and lived in him. But—it wore off. That first tiny lie I made him tell me, and then how sad, yet how sweetly forgiving I was, when later he was made to confess it, how sure I was it would never happen again? Oh, oh! the exquisite subtlety of it! (No, she had not the look of a pervert, the tiny person; nor of a monomaniac. Rather had she the look of a wilful child, whose

captious interest has been spoiled, so that it demands constantly fresh stimulus, fresh novelty to feed on.)

And *this*—why, when I first made up my mind to get him to be unfaithful to me, I searched for *weeks*—Simon, you remember?—*weeks*, before I found Amande—a girl sufficiently delicate in her charm, sufficiently alluring in her combined French and Oriental grace, to win a man as good as gold—even a Boston man! Yes,” nodded the fluffy gold head emphatically, “that took planning, my Simon. I searched all Algiers, I made Akmed search; and then when I had found her——! The divine battledore and shuttlecock I played with those two! With both, the irresistible temptation of negative suggestion: ‘be sure you don’t notice the new maid Amande, Michael—these half-castes are so sensitive about white men—be sure you don’t even see her.’ And ‘you will never interfere with *monsieur*, Amande. *Monsieur* is very busy with his work, and the *bonne* we had before annoyed him by always bringing flowers to his room. You will remember? keep away from *monsieur*.’—Yes, that was it, Simon! I used to try it at school, when there were things I wanted done, and it was successful, invariably—this negative suggestion—successful,

and fascinatingly concealable. Could any one resist the tug of such persistent prohibition? Not Michael, not Amande. That affair crystallized when I went to Gibraltar for a week with the Prentisses. One last warning to them both and—*fait accompli!*” A low chuckle came from the round, baby-white throat. “But I have seen all along that ‘Dolly’ has spoiled Michael’s zest for it—there is a patent innocence about ‘Dolly’ that is disturbing to—ah ‘larkiness.’ It involves things. I am glad I told Michael to call me it. Yes, just now he was miserable enough; and she—ah, *mon Dieu*, the immeasurable advantages of a conscienceless person! She hates me—you saw her face in the glass, Simon *mon choux?*”

Again the small bundle of blue and cloudy gold shook with suppressed laughter. “While he—you shall see, Simon. It is getting to be too much for him, for that sincerity of his: he will tell me, you shall see. Yes, it is time to begin planning some new amusement—but I must be careful. Once this afternoon I almost laughed aloud. That is the one threat upon my subtlety: my sense of humour, Simon. *Eh bien*, my little one, to something new, then! To”—Dorofée stood up, a slow, canny, canny smile spreading to illumine her baby face—“Mrs. Templewaite, I believe?”

"And you did not get your tea, after all, Michael," she purred regretfully, two hours later, as he stopped in for her on his way downstairs. "You came and waited all that long time for it, and then, just when it had come, you went off—forgetting all about it." The angelic eyes regarded him wonderingly.

"Well—er—you see, I decided a bath would be better. After all that long afternoon in the sun——"

"Yes, yes, of course. And then lying here in my room for a whole hour—of course you felt warm and uncomfy," Dorofée acceded softly, watching the handsome face—though apparently busy with her gloves. "And here is Amande with the flowers." The girl in her slim short skirt and bright embroidered bolero stood there silently, with two sprays of jasmine in her hands. "Yes, this one I think—or no, no, that bit you have in your hair, Amande, is prettier than either of them, is it not? You will give me that one, no?" Dorofée raised her face with a divinely childish appeal. As the girl, without a word, took the flowers from either side of her dark hair and fastened them in her mistress's crinky gold locks, Dorofée—always looking in the mirror—smiled delightedly. "Yes, that is *quite* charming—and

they look even prettier on me than they did on you. Come, Michael, the car's waiting—I heard it drive round—and we mustn't keep Mrs. Templewaite. You have my wrap, Amande? Thank you. Good-night. Michael, dear, you go ahead, won't you? These passages after sundown get so dark."

She waited while her husband passed out of the room where Amande was; then with a seraphic backward smile at the uncoifed girl, gathering up the blue sprigged dimity, she too vanished. Following Michael's broad shoulders down the faïenced passage-ways, where once a sultan's favourites strolled and ate kous-kous, she came at last into the open court below, and so to the huge front gates. An Arab chauffeur waited with the motor. He was very dark and tall, and wore the fez. A tiny moustache curved above his white, white teeth, lending him the look of a masquerading baby. He saluted Michael and Dorofée with a dazzling smile.

Dorofée smiled back at him: he was a good servant, Akmed. She and Michael got into the car.

They wound through the town slowly; the old palace Michael had bought and converted into a villa, was on the side of Algiers now no longer

residential. It was crowded in the narrow streets, and Arabs coming from the mosque or huddling in long procession toward some favourite coffee-house, hindered the progress of the big Mercédès. Dorofée did not seem to care: she looked out from under her curly gold pompadour (oh yes, she wore a pompadour) at the dark faces hidden, half, in blue, cool mauve, glowing orange—all the colours of the burnous, which means all the colour in the world—and her own small rose and white face grew more and more serene. Now they were passing a French café; in the arcade outside sat a laughing group of Zouaves, their yellow-braided coats and full red trousers forming background for a marvellously pretty woman—an Arab, but unveiled, and with a wide jewelled band around her head, clusters of gleaming jewels pendant above her ears. She smoked a cigarette, flipping the ashes amusedly into one impudent young officer's face. Dorofée's baby smile rested on her a moment, then flitted to an Arab shop next the café; in the open door, some drinking coffee, squatted a group of turbaned men. One was a little lighter than the rest, and wore a beard below his curious closed mouth. Looking at him, you knew instantly that that mouth was closed forever.

"Who is that man, Akmed?" Dorofée leaned forward, though without great show of interest. "The light-faced one, I mean, back there in Ali's coffee-house? You see?"

"That is Maaz, the Persian, Ashes of Incense," Akmed answered, not turning from the steering wheel one hair's breadth. She had spoken to him in Arabic, so he replied to her, using the name the Arabs had given her—"Ashes of Incense." "He comes from Naishapur and he is very wise. He is a vender of drugs."

"Ah! Then he lives in Algiers? And where is his shop, his house?"

"His house is in the Casbah, little Shadow of Allah." Still Akmed faced straight ahead as he talked. "I think he does not live here very long, but I do not know, for he cannot talk. He has no tongue."

"No tongue? You mean he is a mute? Ah no, I see! He was—punished, no, Akmed?" The soft little voice had grown softer—velvet in its softness. "He was punished?"

"Yes, Ashes of Incense, he was punished. The governor of Naishapur became one day very sick, and the physicians came. And then they sent for Maaz. They did not know very much about Maaz, but they knew he was wise. So the gov-

ernor punished him and sent him away. Then he came here."

"And he lives in the Casbah—is he in his house during the day? Does he—work there, always?"

"Little Joy of Allah, I do not know. All men work some days; no man works all days."

"I think, Dolly dear, you had better not talk to Akmed while we're steering through these narrow places," admonished Michael—who did not understand Arabic, save for a few phrases. "Sit back, until he gets on the hill road, there's a dear child."

The dear child sat back, with a little movement of apology. "I'm so sorry, Michael—I am so stupid about such things. But then you remember for me always; you spoil me—you big, wise Michael."

Michael patted her. She was a comfortable little creature, always docile and—sweet. Yes, that was the word, *sweet*. He had never regretted marrying her, though he could hardly compare his present er—affection for her with that ardent, compelling force that had ruled the first year of their life together. She was assuredly not deep, as people (spelt in his inner mind, Paula) said he was; nor irresistibly alluring like—er—some

French women. If she had been, Michael thought a shade sadly, he would certainly never have given way to the temptations induced by this insidious climate. He was quite sure that climate was at the back of it. In Boston he had never felt temptations. At least, not until he met Dolly. And even then, one could hardly call "temptation" that whirlwind of feeling that had carried him, as his mother bitterly lamented, so far off his feet that he never struck earth again; until a year after he and Dorofée were married, when—Michael gradually observed—Dolly began to be—er—a bit erratic. That is, different from him. Flighty; and—ah—just a shade vapid. Still, after all it was he (Michael was sure) who had engineered his affair of marriage, he who by persistent, cleverly-put argument had finally won Dolly over; by argument and the most entire, unswerving renunciation. If (he reflected modestly, as they climbed the hill) he might allow himself pride in anything, it was that that renunciation had been unswerving. He had never looked back to regret: Beacon Hill, his mother, his gratifyingly increasing law practice. He had said to Dolly, "No, my love (very firmly). No, my love; we have turned our backs on all those things, and we are right. If my mother does not appreciate my sin-

cerity—and Dolly, my darling, sincerity is the greatest thing in the world, is it not?—if the family does not see I have a duty beyond them, and to myself, then my dearest (here Michael's voice had grown roundly *forte*) we must leave them and follow right as we see it."

So they had left. And right—which ended apparently in Algiers—had been followed as Michael saw it, until his already snug fortune had been tripled through the co-operation of grape-vines and orange-trees, and lay in constantly pleasant increase within the vaults of the *Crédit Lyonnais*. If the present fortune (unlike the Boston one) smelt a bit of commerce, what matter? Michael was, as he often (these days) said, an admirer of the sons of toil, a believer in those rugged, sturdy yeomen-gentlemen now regrettably so few. He was glad, for his part, to proclaim himself one of them. And in his spotless white flannels, his immaculate white canvas shoes, with his exactly tied cravat under his unheated scholar's face (unheated save for an occasional bout of tennis, which is a game, after all, that they play in Boston, I understand) he had indeed to proclaim himself. No one, except another Michael, would have known him. "But it is so *wonderful* of you to see the greatness of those things," Mrs.

Templewaite had told him—that was some time ago now—"er—getting back to the soil, and nature, and that, I mean. So few, so very few clever people appreciate nature, don't you find? Ah, Mr. Sargent, they aren't *deep* enough!"

Michael believed they were not. It gave him a delightful, warm feeling to know that Mrs. Templewaite was. She and he—not Templewaite, poor chap! lost in the mere technicalities of writing problem plays—understood. They understood. Which says, I don't deny you, that things were getting on.

On the terrace of the *Prince George* Mrs. Templewaite stood watching while her guests drove in. She was sheathed this evening in deep green, something that shaped her similar to a prolonged pickle. Her hair was very red. Her voice was *very* full: I do not say of what. I do not know. No one knew; except such unoriginals as said temperament.

She greeted Dorofée with a serene kiss upon the brow. To Michael she gave only a long look, and two fingers. "I am so pleased that you were able to come, you pretty baby," the fullness engulfed Dorofée with a rich caress in every tone; "I've not seen you for so long, and you always *renew* me so beautifully with your enchanting

thought-free little ways. Shall we go inside? Guy is in the billiard room, I think."

The three went into the hotel, Michael (who was last) regarding the two women with something more than thought, behind his polished glasses. Why the deuce didn't Dolly get some of those clingy green things? Gave a woman *chic*, and—er—figure. Who could have figure, now, in a blue dimity? And with a pompadour! (Mrs. Templewaite wore her Titian masses in exotic severity, swathed round and round her head.) Enough to blur even a beauty, and Dolly had never been that, though—ahem! attractive enough once, perhaps. In his irritation he almost forgot to speak civilly to Templewaite, a man with whom one (that is, Michael) had always to make an effort.

"Well, have you been doing anything to-day?" he asked him, as they sat down to dinner. "I saw you weren't at tennis this afternoon?"

"No," said Guy Templewaite, with a curious gleam in his tired eyes, "I was working. I didn't play."

"Guy sticks too closely to his desk, I tell him, to accomplish his best work." Mrs. Templewaite turned to Michael with that look that says 'you know what I mean, don't you?' "If only he'd

get out more and—er—talk with things, the trees and the flowers and the beautiful shy birds——”

“Who are so *difficult* to talk to, though, dear Mrs. Templewaite,” murmured Dorofée, raising enormous plaintive eyes.

“He would do more of the kind of work that’s accepted,” finished his wife, kindly. “We shouldn’t have to stop in Algiers during the summer, Guy dear.”

Guy went on with his soup, his sharp spare features undisturbed from their constant friendliness. “Perhaps not,” he said; “then, perhaps, to work at all I have to concentrate more than you do, my dear. Each of us has his own special quirk, in accomplishing, eh Sargent?”

“Um-m. I daresay. I—really I never wrote plays, though; I——”

“You’re just a plain farmer, aren’t you, Michael dear?” came a cooing little voice to aid him. “Just a rough and ready fruit-farmer, as you often say, so nice and *bluntly*. Even in Boston you never wrote anything, did you dearest?”

“I wrote the book on *Industries*, since I came out here,” returned Michael rather stiffly. He wished Dolly would get over this annoying habit of interrupting; it was something quite recent with her. “Carstairs at the library tells me it is

widely called for. I never wrote anything of the more—er—trivial order."

"Ought to try it," advised Templewaite cheerfully; "gives you such a good lesson in modesty. Shows you what little things you can't do—at least it has me," he added apologetically, looking up to find Michael's wife's eyes fixed on him with absorption. Other people called little Mrs. Sargent "harmless," but Templewaite always felt rather ill at ease with her. Although he was a playwright and an American, he knew something about women. More about individuality.

"Ah, but does it show you anything else, Guy—this—this lighter form of writing?" put in his wife. "Does it reveal to you the deeper meaning in life?" She forebore to add, as do prose-poems.

"That's up to you, to reveal in it," retorted Guy, smiling at her. In spite of the green sheath, and the bandaged tresses, and the full, full voice, Guy loved her very completely. Once you had seen him smile at her, you knew that. "The only reason good plays, which is to say, one's own plays, don't go down, is because occasionally they reveal *too* deep of life. People squirm, and managers will tell you that when they squirm they leave their seats vacant for next time."

"Art nowadays is certainly on a deplorable level," observed Michael, his nose for the moment seeming to Dorofée unusually assertive. "It is a grateful relief to find some one like P— Mrs. Templewaite (he looked fixedly at his fish), who writes her soul, and lets the carping public rest."

"Writes her soul—oh, isn't that *beautiful*, Mrs. Templewaite?" Dorofée gazed up at Paula rapturously. "You do do that exactly, don't you? In those lines you read me—'alone, misunderstood, I yet found one'—oh, I thought it was so *exquisite*, that thought (the great child-eyes were unmistakably sincere) 'I yet found one, who lonely too'—what was the rest of that?"

"'Reached out and took my hand,'" Paula finished a bit constrainedly. She did not know that she cared to have Guy think she had written her soul in just those lines. Dolly of course was a mere baby, she wouldn't see in a thousand years; and as for *him*—her heavy dark eyes sent the particular him of this period a sombre, sick-hope look. But Guy—"I—I think those special lines you mention scarcely picture *my* soul, Dolly dearest," she said firmly. "I think they stand rather—yes, I'm sure when I wrote them I meant the Larger Soul, the Universal Sentiment, you know—always so tragically desolate."

"Oh!" Dorofée's rosebud mouth curved awesomely round the vowel. "But still, somebody reached out and took her hand, even the Larger Soul's?" she persisted, shaking her curls about her wide questioning eyes. "I'm so glad for that. In real life, anyway, it makes such a difference. In your play is there a Larger Soul, Mr. Templewaite?" she asked, turning to Guy with a kind little motion of interest. (Michael immediately began talking to Paula in an undertone; they were at the *entrée*, he thought they had been patient long enough.)

"I am afraid not." Guy smiled at the little lady with that frank friendliness he met the world with. "I'm afraid it's wholly concerned with the smaller, petty human souls who are trying to keep brave, and earn a living. Does that kind repel you, Mrs. Sargent?"

"No," said Dorofée slowly, "no one repels me." Then, rather hastily, "but I am sure all the women in your plays—all the nice women—are like Mrs. Templewaite, aren't they?" with a ravishing upward smile at him. "Because—apart from the prose-poems and all those *clever* things—she's the most wonderful woman in the world, isn't she?"

"Yes," said Guy simply (forgetting his dis-

comfort from the tone of the little voice just now), "I think she is."

"And you are head over ears in love with her?" went on Dorofée, so innocently delighted, no one could have dreamed of calling her impertinent. "As much in love as the day you married her—five years ago, was it?"

"Yes," answered Guy to both questions. "Five years ago; yes, every bit as much—I think a good deal more; though that's not modern, is it?"

Dorofée looked a little bewildered, as she always did when people said clever things. "Why do you love her more?" she asked, seizing on the part that she could, patently, understand.

"Why, because I know her better. Because I have her faults now, as well as her bignesses, to love. That makes more, doesn't it?" Guy's blue eyes bent upon the wee face, with a grave beauty in their smile. Dorofée reflected that so, his brown hawk-features were distinctly handsome. "Doesn't it make more with Sargent—with your husband?" he added.

"With Michael?" Dorofée's dimpled hands went up, horrified. "Do you think I could find faults in *Michael*—my big, beautiful, wise, wise husband?—oh, Mr. Templewaite! You can't know Michael. Why, beside him I feel just a

stupid little handful of putty. I am putty, you know—I haven't an idea of my own (with a shallow little laugh). I feel so very silly and—and a doll, really you know, to be his wife. I'm always so *glad* when I see him engrossed with some clever, clever woman like your wife—like Mrs. Templewaite. I know just how much he must enjoy her, how she must stimulate him. They're both *so* clever, aren't they?" Her glance, beckoning Guy's, seemed to enclose them (Michael and Paula) very much together. As a matter of fact, they were sufficiently absorbed.

"Yes," Guy answered a trifle absently, "very—er—very clever." One of the reasons he felt ill at ease with Mrs. Sargent was that she always made him lie, somehow. He was an abnormally truthful person, and yet he could not be with Dorofée five minutes before she made him tell just such a tarra-diddle as he had been guilty of this minute. He knew perfectly well Paula was not clever, that she was even rather pathetically clumsy in her attempts at cleverness; and that for that very reason he loved her the more tenderly. He knew enough about Michael to know that if the *littérateur* fruit-farmer was clever, he (Guy) hoped nobody else on earth was. Yet, at the questioning of that velvet little voice, he had just

replied—twice—that he thought them both *very* clever!

“I suppose that’s why they always have so very much to say to each other, don’t you?” Dorofée was pondering half to herself as she crunched her salad. “Some one (her eyes fixed on Guy’s uncertainly)—I think it was Mr. Howland—was saying to me only the other day, ‘your husband and Mrs. Templewaite seem to have a great deal to say to each other.’ And I said, ‘but of course, why shouldn’t they?’ And he said, after me again, ‘why shouldn’t they indeed?’ Such a funny man, isn’t he, Mr. Howland?” Dorofée had seen Guy’s frank face quite often enough to be intimate with his dislikes.

“Very funny,” said Guy shortly. This time the lie was quite mechanical.

“I thought it was so queer, his noticing Mrs. Templewaite and Michael enough to say that of them. But then I suppose people do notice them, they’re both so brilliant, so wonderfully gifted; they’re bound to be conspicuous, I suppose. And then, Mr. Howland says all the men in Algiers have been in love with Mrs. Templewaite, ever since she came. Isn’t that *lovely*, Mr. Templewaite? Aren’t you just awfully proud?”

“Of all the men in Algiers—being in love with

her?" Guy laughed, looking at Paula rather fixedly. "Well, no, I can't say I am. There are some of them I'd just as soon would confine their attentions elsewhere."

"Oh, but you aren't *jealous*?" Dorofée's laugh rippled like limpid water. "You mustn't be," she chided gently, "because Mrs. Templewaite—your wife—is a genius, and the whole world may love a genius, mayn't it?—and be loved by her? That's what I always think about Michael—I mean to say (the poor little person was covered with a beautiful confusion) about Michael as a genius, of course. Not—er—with regard to Mrs. Templewaite." She turned a dazzling, deprecatory smile on Mr. Templewaite. His tanned sharp-cut features looked a trifle set.

Just then, "Dolly dear, will you come?" Paula's fullest voice asked caressingly. "I think we will leave these men to have their smoke, and wait for them on the terrace. It has been such a *wonderful* talk," she murmured to Michael, rising, "so—so *breathlessly* wonderful, hasn't it?"

Michael looked at her. Paula's husband caught the look, and his brown face paled with some emotion that brought to Dorofée's childish eyes a gleam of pleasure.

"Your husband is such a dear," she cooed to

Paula, as they strolled together on the terrace (Paula a Vernissage poster, Dorofée a Kate Greenaway print). "He's so simple, and not a bit suspicious, you know. I mean,"—the dimpled arm within Paula's tightened its appealing hold—"so many men with beautiful, clever wives would be always looking for something horrid—in other men, you know; but your husband is just the other way. I believe he'd close his eyes to anything that *did* happen—dear Mrs. Templewaite, you know what I mean, don't you? I mean if any of these men who admire you so much, like Mr. Howland, for instance, *should* fall in love with you."

Paula, in the shadows, smiled: the child was too deliciously quaint; "Yes, little Dolly, I believe he would (poor Guy, his eyes had been closed to Howland and a good many others—Paula thought); as you say, dear, Guy is of a beautiful, simple nature. Sometimes," she sighed deeply, "I could wish he were a bit more subtle. Sometimes there are hidden profundities in myself I dare not show him. He would not understand."

The tiny figure beside her shook suddenly—with a fit of coughing. "Yes, yes—oh, there *must* be," gasped Dorofée, her hand over her mouth.

"I—I am sure you are quite right not to show him, not to try to make him understand. Ah, you are so far above us, you people of genius"—the vacant baby face gazed up at Paula reverently—"we cannot hope to understand you. We can only look up at you from a great way off, and sigh, we silly little things. But perhaps (timidly) some of you up there understand each other?"

"Yes," said Paula dreamily.

"Once in a *great* while? And then—oh, how beautiful it must be! When I was a little girl, I saw such a lovely play in Paris once," went on Dorofée, with the ingenuous chattering eloquence of ten-years-old; "it was the story of a beautiful, beautiful woman, an artist (of the stage, I think), and of all these *quantities* of men who were in love with her. And she, she loved them all, too—yes, all of them. For she explained, at the end of the play you know, that it was her part in Life's great Plan to show Love in its divinity to all men, to teach each man—though fleetingly—what love was. Don't you think that's an *exquisite* thought?"

"Yes," said Paula—yet more dreamily than before. She had never thought the little thing had so much artistic appreciation in her, really.

"I often think of that woman," said the little thing, with a cherubic wistfulness. "I think if there were only some one *now* who had that beautiful unselfish spirit. How ennobling it would be, how inspiring to us who have always to look on. Anyway, Mrs. Templewaite, I should *like* my husband to be in love with a woman like that! I should be proud of it, and prouder than ever of him—for I know that he would love me, his little dependent Dolly, all the more in consequence. But," she sighed to the depths of her wee blue shoes, "nowadays, in Algiers, there are no such goddesses; there are no women brave enough to face the world's misunderstanding. The world's misunderstanding!—that, Michael says, is the Stupendous Tragedy."

"It is," confirmed Paula, pushing back the copper bandages with an abandon of stifled temperament. Dolly dear, I had no idea your little soul felt these things; I must kiss you."

"Oh, I don't suppose I *feel* them," returned Dorofée, sweetly enraptured under the kiss, "I don't understand them enough to feel them, dear Mrs. Templewaite. But I accept—that is it, I accept. There is nothing Michael or you or any great genius could do, I think, that I would not

accept. For I am sure it must be frightfully hard, being a genius."

"It is," avowed Paula, in her emotion ceasing for a moment to walk, "oh, it is."

"And the hardest part of it must be your own complexity," proceeded Dorofée, drawing her persistently along, "I mean that one person alone can never satisfy your many-sided nature."

"Ah, Dolly, little Dolly, that is so *true!*" breathed Paula fervently. "But you baby, you dear little Dolly-thing, how did you know?"

"Dearest Mrs. Templewaite," purred Dolly-thing (and Paula was infinitely touched to see her biting her lips to control their quivering), "I didn't know. I only guessed because I—you see, there's Michael. I know Michael's that way. I think it must be characteristic of geniuses. Anyway," she dropped her voice to a satin-soft whisper, as they saw the men approaching, "I hope you do not always *stay* lonely, dear Mrs. Templewaite. I hope you find your—your affinity, is that it?—very soon, and that you are oh, so happy! Yes, Michael dear, we have had a lovely, lovely walk, and Mrs. Templewaite has been so sweet and good, to listen to my chatter. Bridge? I think that would be *nice*, only not too late, you know (this to Guy), because to-

tomorrow Michael has a long day at the farms. He always drives out once a week and stays all day—oh, there's quite a nice little villa out there. But I never go, somehow—I'm too lazy (again the shallow, rippling laugh). Poor Michael, I'm such a selfish little silly, aren't I? I know you hate going to the farms alone. Shall we go in then? I'm dying to make it no trumps!"

II

AROUND the cool faïenced court of the palace that was now her home, Dorofée was walking—walking very leisurely, with her hands twirling her hat behind her. A few paces behind, followed Simon, very leisurely also, and very, very stately in the glisten of his new-washed fluff. For it was morning, quite early morning, and Simon and Dorofée both just descended from the frilly blue and white room.

It seemed that Dorofée was conning a song; at least she was swinging her hat to the rhythm of some words she said sing-song—in the monotonous, run-together voice of those who chant the Koran. “Right, Wrong; Honour, Duty; Sincerity, Right; Wrong, Honour—all that go; to make a conscience, Michael says,—oh la, la!” The chant ended suddenly and from the throat so infant-soft and white, broke a low chuckle. “And Michael is at this moment rolling out the Farms Road with Paula Templewaite,—that other genius! They arranged it when we went out to look at the moon. The husband didn’t

notice, but I did. Oh la, la! I tell you it is too delicious, this squashing of Sincerity and Right and Honour, underneath the feet of my beautiful, strange-working subtlety! It is (she looked at her tiny fingers curiously) almost too Punch and Judy. Ah, but last night I nearly laughed again." The smiling baby face grew very grave. "I must be more careful or my sense of humour will get the better of me yet. It is the only foe I have. All the rest, especially Michael, work with me perfectly. I have decided, Simon (though he was behind her, it was to him always that she talked: the Arabs called him 'Spirit of Silence'), to set about something really difficult, to prove that I can overcome something maddeningly complex and make it dissolve into just elements. What shall it be? I don't know yet; though"—the eyes under the crinkly pompadour were as palely inscrutable as Simon's own—"I have an idea. The beginnings of an idea. Of course Michael is the nucleus; the sincerest person always is. Besides it is Michael whose conscience I am unmaking—remaking, until it tells him to do wrong, wrong, wrong! That Wrong is Right, and that Lies are Truth, and that in doing what he *wants* to do, he is doing what he *ought* to do—that bombastic Ought that scares the life out of him! Yes, it

is Michael who shall be the pivot of my plan, it is he who shall be made to do the wrongest things, as people with consciences call them. What are the wrongest things, Simon, do you think?"

The fairy-like figure paused, counting on her fingers—one, two, three—"sixth, seventh and eighth, in the Decalogue, no, Simon? Yes, I think they are accounted to be the wrongest. Then those (wagged the curly head) are what Michael must do. He has already done one," pensively, "but that doesn't matter. To remake a person, you must remake him *thoroughly*: Michael shall do all three. And"—with that slow-spreading canny smile—"Paula shall help him. I suppose, Simon," Dorofée twirled the rosebud-laden hat reflectively, "the biggest thing a man could steal would be some other man's wife, eh? Really steal her, I mean—not just the ordinary thing—steal her and carry her off to his own place for keeps. Um-m. Yes—yes, I think so. And all that is nicely started; I laid the basis of that part last night. For Paula's husband—poor doting simpleton!—loves her; very differently from the way Michael and Paula love; the way"—she checked herself. Before he had begun to bore her, when the madness that had made her

marry Michael still dominated—but all that was ended. She had gone back to the *real* madness, the inherent passion: of playing jokes.

“He would never give her up, that husband,” went on Dorofée. “Michael would have to steal her. As for the seventh, the intermediary sin, they will of course commit that first, Michael and Paula. Temperamental people, Simon,” sighed the rose-leaf little person, “have absolutely no sense of proportion: that’s inevitable.

“But the third sin—the ‘shalt do no murder’ sin? What about that—how am I to make Michael do that? You see, Simon,” she laughed delightedly, “how perfectly complex it is? ‘Thou shalt do no murder’—I wonder——”

“Ashes of Incense, I kiss your feet. Will you go into the Casbah to-day?” Akmed came noiselessly up from behind her and stood tall and very dark, in spite of his gleaming teeth. “I have thought perhaps the Shadow of Allah would visit the Casbah to-day,” he repeated gently.

Dorofée regarded him. “Then you did not go with milord Sargent and the car?”

“Milord Sargent wished to drive the car himself, Ashes of Incense. He told me I might have this day for my own.”

“H—m. I see. And you give it to me, the

day? You will take me into the Casbah—into the Arab town?" The small face was alight. "Quick then, the clothes, Akmed! I will slip into the old lodge and change. Amande is upstairs. N'ala and the cook are in the kitchen—quick, bring the basket to the old lodge."

"And the Spirit of Silence?" questioned Akmed, looking at Simon, who sat aloof in the shade of the plashing fountain.

"He must stay. They would know me by him. Take him upstairs."

"They know you anyhow, by the hands. Besides, no Arab woman is so small. But it matters not, if you are with me. Wait, I bring the clothes."

He disappeared, returning in a few moments with a deep, covered basket, which he carried along the court to an unused room at the far end. Dorofée received the basket; and half an hour later went out through the old porter's door, into the street—a close-veiled Arab woman.

Akmed was waiting. He looked at the little figure, in the fantastically full white trousers, the white head-veil covering her completely, the mysterious haïck coming close up to her eyes; and he smiled. The Arabs might recognize her,—she was too diminutive to have escaped becoming a

celebrity in Algiers—but they would be puzzled. Not one of those fluffy golden hairs showed; no scrap of the scrap of a person showed, except her eyes. And the eyes now, gazing at you long and palely sinister over and from under those concealing veils of white, were far from being the eyes of the wife of milord Sargent. Akmed remembered it was those who had seen only the eyes, who had named her 'Ashes of Incense.'

Dorofée, too, thought of the name, as they walked along in silence down the empty street. She had asked Akmed, the first time they returned from his taking her to the Arab quarter, why the Arabs called her that: what it meant. "How do I know what it means?" he had answered very simply. "Ashes are grey, white-grey and very soft. Incense is sweet. It burns; some of it will burn even after once it has gone to ashes. In Algiers they use incense ashes for separating and testing the most precious metals. But who can say what the name means? I do not know."

Dorofée had looked at him—with a little smile behind her eyes. From that day she had liked Arabs, Akmed most of all. To reveal everything, the while proving there is nothing to conceal—paramount of subtlety! As for Simon's

name—his Arab name—it told itself. Dorofée had allowed Akmed to carry the great cat in his arms several times when they went to the Casbah, and the people who adore animals and know them, had instantly found an appellative for the grey-blue Sphinx. They were so devoted to him, admired him at such extravagant length, that Dorofée had had, recently, to leave him at home. Otherwise the visits to the Casbah would have been all Simon's.

"Where are we going to-day?" she asked Akmed, walking along demurely beside him as they threaded the crowded square.

"I thought we would go to the Great Mosque, Rose of Gold, as it is the hour of prayer; and then, if you will like it, to the house of Maaz."

"Ah—yes." Dorofée stopped still for a full minute. "Maaz, whom we saw last night—you said he was a vender of herbs, did you not, Akmed?"

"Yes, Rose of Gold, a vender of herbs. And with no tongue," added Akmed sunnily.

"I should like to go. But first the Mosque, yes."

She followed Akmed within the bare white court, left him—as the Arab women must—at the door of the Mosque and ascended to the

women's gallery. The Muezzin had called to prayer; in the Mosque the faithful knelt and prostrated themselves toward Mecca. Dorofée knelt too. Under its voluminous veils, her tiny figure rocked, swayed back and forth, as the eternal chant began. "Allah! Allah! Allah!" "Wrong, Right, Wrong!" swayed Dorofée. "Murder, Murder, Murder." Under the long haïck she chuckled, noiselessly. What if she should strike a plan, within the House of Allah? She rocked back and forth, convulsed. The sublime joke of it!—The very worst murder a man could possibly do—to conceive that, within the House of Allah! Why (the tiny figure straightened with a jerk, a sudden stiffening) the very worst murder a man could do would be to *murder his own wife!* Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! She prostrated herself and shook. To plan one's own murder, and effect it—that was *too* good. That was supreme. Yes (she rose and left the Mosque, still shaking with laughter underneath her veil) that was to prove oneself supreme. That was to place oneself forever only lower than the Great Jester. She would do it.

As she stole down and out into the court to wait for Akmed, she passed another white-veiled figure standing in the shadow with a priest. Only

the priest's grave brown face beneath his turban, and the woman's two wonderfully expressive hands lifted to him flutteringly stood out against the white everywhere. Dorofée chuckled, silently: the woman was making her marriage confession—Poor thing! but perhaps—the thought arrested Dorofée—she was not marrying a Michael. No doubt she was marrying an Arab, at least fierce and commanding; her master, who would rule her, adore her, maybe kill her—but what of that? She was going to *live*. Dorofée, behind the haïck, drew a short, sharp breath. She had not always been a brain. Once, the first year of her marriage, she had been—but she laughed at herself now for remembering it.

When Akmed came out, "We will go at once to the house of Maaz?" the velvet voice asked, a little quickly.

"If it will please you," returned Akmed serenely. And he led the way.

Up, up they went through the thread-like streets, up the steep rows of worn steps, swarming always with children and old men sitting bare-legged in the sun; and overtopped by leaning balconies, whose windows met like lidless eyes—peering into the souls of one another. They seemed like wardens of the sky, these slanting

balconies, forbidding all but the veriest speck of their prisoner to be seen. The two who were climbing up, underneath them, paused to rest at the top of some stairs. It was noon now, and very hot. Within their shops the Arabs lay curled up on benches near the door, or squatted, smoking hashish, in a corner.

"Beyond that cobbler's is the house of Maaz," said Akmed, nodding up a dim-lit street; "that is his dog beside the door. Shall we go?"

Over the beaten-down door where the white poodle sat, it read, in Arabic, "Maaz Attár, VENDER OF HERBS AND PRECIOUS SCENTS." Dorofée made Akmed spell it out to her, before they went in. "Herbs and precious scents"—she liked scents, the ones the Arabs used. They were interesting. The eyes above the haïck regarded Maaz meditatively.

"A lady who would buy something," announced Akmed, with an impressive bow.

Maaz salaamed to the veiled figure gravely. Then he placed a stool for her. His eyes turned to Akmed inquiringly; as the Arab had said, he had no tongue.

"What do you want to ask him, Ashes of Incense?"

"Have you any scents that *burn*," asked Dorofée deliberately, "any very *strong* scents?"

Maaz turned, and from a jar on the ledge behind him took several packets wrapped in different coloured cloths. Mutely he spread them before her on a sort of counter.

"And are they very strong?" asked the little voice again.

The Persian made a movement as though to carry them to his nose. Dorofée raised one packet and smelt it through her veil. "Allah! I should think so! And how sweet!—which is the sweetest, oh wise one?"

Maaz selected a rose-coloured packet.

"This? And is it the strongest too?"

The druggist bowed. His curly white dog had jumped upon a bench and was sniffing fussily.

"Then please—if it is not too precious—light just a leaf or two." She motioned to Akmed, who laid some silver on the ledge. "I am very fond of scent," said the soft voice dreamily.

Maaz selected a small, square leaf from the rose packet. On some delicate scales he tested it carefully; then he put it in a crucible and held a taper to it. The eyes above the haïck watched him, fascinated. Akmed and the curly white poodle watched him too.

After a moment the leaf began to burn; slowly, slowly, and with a curious, overpowering fragrance. Dorofée moved her stool nearer the door—the haïck seemed very close against her mouth. It was only a few minutes but it seemed a long, long time before the pale smoke of the burning leaf ceased to be; and she caught herself nodding, as she rose to go and examine it. In the crucible now were only a few ashes—pale, pale grey, but very sweet.

“You who have so much knowledge,” said the purring voice sweetly, “say: is this lovely scent of any harm? Can it destroy?”

The tight-closed mouth gave no answer. The marvellously expressive eyes might be said to have shrugged.

“How much destroys?” asked the voice from beneath the veil. “It will pay you to speak the truth; for so I shall live to buy more.”

The herb-seller selected a leaf about three times as large as the one he had just burnt. He placed it on one side, the very much smaller leaf on the other side of the fragrant rose packet.

“I see. I will have *quite* a large packet of the smaller leaves then—though I suppose it is very precious? And—yes, one or two of the very large ones, also: they will serve to ward off

the evil spirits." A laugh as light as ashes themselves floated through the filmy veil. "Akmed, you arrange with the wise one—and, ah yes, for the crucible too; a very pretty crucible, Akmed." She turned again toward the door, as Akmed—a tall, self-effaced shadow during the small one's inquiries—came forward, and the two pairs of henna-stained hands began violent gesticulation.

She turned, seeking more air after the overwhelming sweetness of the low, close room; but her eyes were arrested by the sight of Maaz's fussy white dog, lying in heavy slumber on the bench. The pale eyes stole a furtive glance at the two absorbed in manual argument, then swiftly the wee hands pinched the dog; it did not move. And a small, satisfied smile lurked in the gaze from over the haïck. Sometimes Arabs, Persians—even herb-sellers without tongues—told lies. Apparently Maaz was not of these.

When Akmed joined her in the doorway, "It is all arranged?" she asked softly—almost exultantly.

"Ashes of Incense, it is arranged." The Arab handed her two packets—one of them very small, tied in scarlet, and the tiny pink and white hands hid them carefully in her voluminous white. "Shall we go?"

They left the beaten-down door and the bench where the curly white dog still snored, and wound their way to the head of the next street. "But he is very wise, the herb-seller," said Dorofée, looking back at him standing grave and impassive by his door; "he is very full of knowledge, the great Maaz," she said, watching his closed mouth.

"He is very wise," repeated Akmed with a monotony grown melodious, "and he has no tongue. Oh, Rose of Gold, will you go yonder to that Arab house and eat the second meal? You can have rice and red wine and the kous-kous."

"Yes," cried Dorofée, skipping along in her eagerness, "I can eat kous-kous and think. Let us go."

When Michael came home that evening, his wife was sitting in the garden, garbed in rose-sprigged dimity, and with a blue velvet snood in her curls. "You had a hard, nasty day, dearest, didn't you?" All sweet commiseration, she went down the arbour to meet him. Michael had bought an Arab palace because he said it had 'atmosphere,' and had then proceeded to tack a typical French garden on one end of it—roses, pansies, bluets, mignonette possessed the enclo-

sure, in elaborately simple French fashion; while great masses of orange honey-suckle climbed to Dorofée's blue and white room, and an arbour of wistaria, with its deep hanging clusters, ran the length of the garden and so to the door into the inner court. When Michael came home, Dorofée was always in the garden (or in her equally French and frivolous room); when he went out, she was in the faïenced Arab court, where old blue and mauve and yellow, purple, green and warm rose pink, melted into rich indefiniteness round the tiled walls, and the cactus and two date palms formed the only hint of flowers.

"I was beginning to think you were lost," chided Dorofée, kissing her husband once more often than usual; "come and sit down, you poor boy, and tell me all about your day. You *had* a nasty day, hadn't you?" She waited anxiously.

"Why—er—no, Dolly, no—that is not such a bad day. It was hot, of course, but——" Michael too sat down beneath the arbour. His handsome high-bred face was flushed; he spoke rather feverishly.

"Yes, yes, so hot; and then you were lonely, Michael darling, weren't you? It was too bad

of me to let you drive out all alone—you didn't even take Akmed?"

"No, I—you see, I thought it would be rather fun to drive myself, just once, so——"

"So you did, of course. You drove out quite by yourself!" Dorofée's angelic round eyes were intent on him. "And then you had all this long day alone at the Villa des Fruits—well, I've been lonely too," she added plaintively. "I thought about you all day long, Michael dear, and wished I'd gone with you. Once I almost decided to take the Stanhope and drive out with Akmed—then I would have surprised you, wouldn't I?" The rose lips smiled deliciously at Michael's crimsoning face. "But I didn't. I telephoned Mrs. Templewaite instead, to ask her to come to tea. But she was gone for the day, too." The round eyes added innocently, "Wasn't that odd?"

"Oh!—I suppose she was out—out somewhere?" Michael rose, in spite of his warm face, and began pacing up and down the arbour.

Dorofée watched him, with an adoring concentration. "Yes, she was out somewhere. Her husband said she'd left quite early—to spend the day at El Nahro, with some friends. I told him you were out too; that that was why I telephoned. Because I was so lonely, you know;" she went

on instantly, "he seemed rather upset about something—Mr. Templewaite, at least he was quite curt, and stopped speaking suddenly. He *is* curt, don't you think so, Michael?"

"Yes," said Michael, and he said it fulsomely, "I do. Hello, what's this?" as Amande appeared, bearing a tray which she set down on one of the iron garden tables. "Lemon squash—that *is* good. That—that was very thoughtful, Amande, thank you."

The girl bent her head silently and withdrew.

"It *was* thoughtful of her, wasn't it, Michael dear?" cooed Dorofée. "I think Amande is always thoughtful of you. And isn't she pretty too, poor little half-caste! I've always been so glad Akmed found her for us when we decided to have an extra maid—she's been so faithful, hasn't she, Michael?"

"Dolly, I—I've got to tell you something," blundered Michael, sitting down very quickly. "I can't go on this way any longer."

"Why *Michael* dear, what's the matter?" Dorofée got up and moved round behind him, clasping her dimpled arms about his neck. "But it's nothing to do with Amande—that you can't go on with?" she asked, when he could no longer see her face.

"Dolly, I—I was talking with Mrs. Templewaite—er—the other day,"—Michael moved his neck as though the clinging arms choked him—"and she said—talking about honour and one's duty to one's conscience—that she thought no man was sincere to himself, or did the right, if he kept any of his heart hidden from a woman who loved him."

"Um-m," murmured the purring voice behind him. "How like her that sounds!—dear, open Mrs. Templewaite! And what else did she say, Michael?"

"She said that if a woman trusted a man and believed in his inner good,—that there was an inner good that nothing could quench (Michael's nervousness always diminished as his oratory increased), she would want to know all—and understand all. She said no honourable man would deny a woman his—er—his weaknesses."

"But, dearest Michael—my big strong husband, *you* haven't any weaknesses, you silly boy! What do you mean, Michael dear?" Those fond little hands were caressing his hair now.

"Yes, I have!" bolted Michael miserably, feeling the hands like hot coals of fire. "Dolly, I've been terribly dishonourable to you—and as Paula, as Mrs. Templewaite says, you're the sweetest,

most unsuspecting little wife in the world. ("Did she say that?" murmured Dorofée, "how exquisite.") I—I've been unfaithful to you, Dolly!" Almost before she knew it, he was on his feet and facing her, his face quivering with shame.

"You—unfaithful? Michael!" The baby face had grown very serious indeed. "But your conscience, Michael—no, it can't be." She stepped back a space and stood regarding him, her pompadour shaken over her shocked eyes.

"My conscience was—I don't know where," said poor Michael, more sincerely than he had ever said anything. "I—she was just very, very beautiful, Dolly, and—and maddeningly attractive to me, and I couldn't help it, that's all. My conscience and all the rest let go."

"I see." Dorofée looked at him sorrowfully. It was clear (to Michael) her Great Ideal lay shattered. At the same time, it came to him, gratefully, that she was not a woman who made scenes. "When—dear Michael, you will be truthful with me, won't you? Else how am I to know about this awful affair?—When did it all happen?"

"It happened—first—when you went to Gibraltar with the Prentisses."

"And was the woman—one of our friends, I

suppose? You said she was beautiful, didn't you? Then I ought to know—it's been a year now since I went to Gibraltar. Tell me, Michael, do I know the woman? Who was she?"

"She was—she was not one of our friends, no." Michael turned and walked a few steps away. If the earth had opened to swallow him up, I think he would have looked happier. "She was—Amande."

"*Amande!*" Dorofée rushed to him and caught his sleeve, her rose-leaf face aghast with horror. "No, no, Michael, you're joking—and you mustn't joke in this matter that to me is so frightfully serious! No, Michael, not Amande, not a half-caste, a pariah, a poor wretched little serving-maid—no, tell me the truth, Michael—don't try so nobly to shield the woman. Tell me, who was she?"

"It is true. She was Amande." Michael sat down heavily. His worst was over.

"*Amande!*" Dorofée repeated, with a tragic distinctness. "And how long, Michael, has this been going on? Since I went to Gibraltar you say? Michael, when did it stop—if it has stopped?" The great childish eyes fixed upon him were mournfully reproachful.

"It stopped two months ago," said Michael doggedly.

"Two months ago; at the beginning of summer." It was then that the male guests at the *Prince George* dwindled. "And for all that time, Michael—until Mrs. Templewaite talked to you about it—your conscience never told you you were doing Wrong? Oh, Michael, Michael, what would your mother say!"

"I don't know what she'd say," returned Michael still more doggedly. "Hang it, Dolly, there are times when a man doesn't remember what his mother'd say! And—er—Mrs. Templewaite didn't talk to me about *it*, she talked to me just in the abstract."

"Oh! I see, in the abstract." Dorofée sat down too, drearily. She leaned her sad little face upon her hands. (Michael watched her miserably. After all, he was more uncomfortable than if she had made a scene.) "Then she doesn't know about Amande? Ah!" she straightened suddenly. "Then I shall ask her to take her. She told me she was looking for a maid, and Amande would suit her beautifully. That's just what we must do with the poor thing, Michael."

"No," said Michael decidedly. "I don't think it would do at all. No, Dolly, I can't consent to her going to Mrs. Templewaite."

"But Michael *dear*," Dorofée's tone was the

patient one toward a naughty fractious schoolboy, "you surely don't want to keep Amande *here*?"

"No, no—send her away, send her anywhere you like, only not to P—to Mrs. Templewaite. I couldn't stand that. I couldn't stand seeing her about all the time, you know," finished Michael desperately—and somewhat equivocally.

"And you would see her about all the time if she was Mrs. Templewaite's maid," mused Dorofée innocently; "yes, at tennis, of course, and when she'd come to bring wraps and things. Yes; well perhaps you are right, Michael. Perhaps it would be just a little more *delicate* not to place Amande with Mrs. Templewaite. Particularly as we're so intimate with the Templewaites just now. I must think of some other way to get rid of the poor depraved creature."

Dorofée came over and sat on Michael's knee, a divine forgiveness on her gold-framed little face. "Michael, dear, this has all been very terrible, and it has shaken my trust in you—in your inner good, just a little. You can understand that? But, dearest, since I know that you have told me *everything*, that there is no longer the least mite of insincerity or deception between us, I can forget. I know, Michael, that your conscience once aroused, as it is now, will never let

you do such a thing again, and that from now on you are going to be as honest as the day with me, that you are going to do only right." She kissed him with a sort of purging tenderness.

Michael squirmed. At the same time relief—relief that amounted almost to astonishment—spread over his clever features. "You—you really forgive me, Dolly?" he said, wonderingly.

Dorofée kissed him again—this time with solemnity. "I forgive you—yes, my husband. And you thought about that awful thing all day, you poor dear?" went on the little voice now grown compassionate. "All this lonely day you've thought about what Mrs. Templewaite said, and about telling me? Ah, how wonderful of Mrs. Templewaite to make you see the Right so beautifully, Michael! I shall always love her for it—try some way to repay her."

"She is a very wonderful woman," said Michael—with more conviction than he had said anything for some minutes. Now that confession was over, forgiveness granted, Michael began to grow impatient of humility; after all, since Dolly had accepted things with no more fuss than she had, why should he feel so cut up about them? Assurance returned to him on comforting strides.

"Mrs. Templewaite is a very wonderful woman," he repeated.

"I fear, though, she is none too happy with Mr. Templewaite—such a brusque, cold man, is he not, Michael? Over the 'phone to-day he was quite short. One could see he didn't want Mrs. Templewaite out of his sight. She's like his prisoner, poor beautiful thing, isn't she?"

"Yes," said Michael, putting his wife off his knee, and beginning to pace up and down—not, this time, from thinking of his weaknesses. "I—you know, I think he's a brute to her, Dolly, and that's the truth. I think, just as you say, he jails her. And that sort of man, that material-minded, callous type, could never understand Paula—Templewaite," he added quickly. "She seems to me a very unhappy woman, and I think we should be doing a real kindness if we would ask her here sometimes—while he's away, I mean."

Dorofée coughed slightly. Some of the most exquisite morsels are the unexpected.

"Indeed yes, Michael dear; but—when is Mr. Templewaite going away? He——"

"Next week," answered Michael promptly. "That is, I think it's next week, Dolly," he added with more uncertainty. "He's to meet some

actor-manager in Gib. to go over a play, Mrs. Templewaite told me."

"Oh—she told you? Told you last night, I suppose. Yes, yes, I see." Walking up and down beside him, Dorofée's fluffy golden head was bent thoughtfully. "Then yes, of course, Michael dear, that is just the time to invite her, isn't it—next week?" she looked up brightly. "And we must do everything we can to make her have a truly *interesting* time. You'll have to do the lion's share," with a rippling laugh, "I'm such a little stupid beside Mrs. Templewaite—and you and she get on so *beautifully*, just as though you were made for each other." She looked up at him admiringly.

Michael beamed. "Then it's settled. And you'll ask her to-morrow? Only I wouldn't do it when he's around, Dolly—he's such a domineering person. Just settle it all quietly with Paula, and let her tell him."

"Yes, I'll settle it all quietly with Paula," echoed Dorofée softly. The name passed this time like a trump card.

"That's very nice. And now I must go and dress—it's nearly dinner time, eh?" Michael looked unaccountably pleased with himself. You would never have known that he had half an

hour ago been writhing under the tale of an unsavoury past—a just-past. He went into the house with his arm round his wife's waist. "Yes, I certainly need a change," he went on, going up the stairs, "must needs off with the old, on with the new, eh, Dolly?" jocosely.

"Exactly," said Dorofée delightedly. "Oh, Michael, Michael, how *clever* you are!"

"Nonsense, my dear, I'm only—hello, what's that? That queer smell in the hall? Smells like cloves or something—why it's in your room, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Dorofée, smiling at him like a pleased child, as she left him at his door, "it is some scent Akmed bought me. It is called—'Ashes of Incense.'"

III

AGAIN Dorofée in rose-sprigged dimity sat under the wistaria arbour. This afternoon Simon, instead of Michael, sat a few yards off, gazing at his mistress with an uninterested fixity. On the fretted white iron table before her lay some writing materials; and a little pale blue book, across whose linen cover was stamped "Dolly" in elaborate slanting white script. Dorofée held the book half open—on the first of the blank pages she had just written "To my mother-in-law" in clear, round copy-book letters. "Yes, Simon," she mused, biting the end of her dainty filigree pen, "that's a very good dedication—To my mother-in-law—for she is certainly the one who will appreciate what I write in it, to the most piquant extent. And then through her it will lose none of its deliciously subtle points in reaching the rest of the world: rather it will gain a few, *mon beau*. Think"—the eyes beneath the fluffy pompadour were the eyes that gazed above the haïck—"how I'll laugh, out in space somewhere, when I see them reading about my plan—

my plan that came true! For I'm going to write it all down in this little blue book, Simon, and have it sent at the end to Michael's mother. Isn't that the most exquisite quibble? To send Michael's mother a history of how I've unmade Michael, and made him over again, without a conscience? So much without a conscience that he not only lied and lied to me—me, to marry whom he broke with all his world—ah, but both of us were mad then. One goes mad, you know, Simon, when one is young, and one's mind forgets for awhile. (She had lost sight of the little blue book, and the great cat, and the garden, for a moment. Her pale grey eyes had darkened with some emotion almost forgotten by them. Then she recovered herself swiftly).

"That he not only was unfaithful to me with a wretched little half-caste, a *chi-chi*, but that at last—so complete was his degeneration—he even stole another woman to replace me, and then murdered me! Oh la! la!" Dorofée in the rose-sprigged dimity chuckled inside her baby-white throat. "Simon, my little cabbage, many women have suicided, but what woman has ever had herself murdered, eh?—and then—oh the sublime joke of it!—let the world into the secret afterwards! Ah! it is *that*—to have oneself

murdered all quietly, in a fashion absolutely undetectable, and then when the murderer—poor silly, smiling fool—is quite, quite sure no one can ever find him out—ecco! In Boston appears a little blue-bound book, that tells it all! and much, much more that will open the poor fool's clever eyes. Ah yes," with a sigh of exultation, "it is that—to prove to the whole world, after one is maddeningly out of the world's reach, that one fooled them all, and dissolved their conscience into honey of desire—it is that, which will immortalize oneself forever, no, Simon?"

The Spirit of Silence looked back at her, impenetrable.

"And now to tell Mother-in-law about Amande and Paula!—but first, to be truly artistic, I must have an introduction, I suppose—eating the jam, perhaps, that's far enough back, and knocking myself first head then foot, in my class at school; ah, how I adored doing that! Even the grin of triumph on the face of the irrelevant self-conscious marionette who was slid into my place, intoxicated me—yes, I shall have introduction enough. And then—! to the affair in hand! Oh, Simon, Simon, it is working beautifully—just like the little fitted pieces of a picture-puzzle, Simon." The angelic baby face grew dreamily retrospec-

tive, as it gazed on a frivolous butterfly made of roses and heliotrope, on the smooth garden lawn.

"Ten days since Michael was driven by Paula's talk on sincerity (the small figure shook with noiseless laughter) to tell me about Amande. Ten days since he declared off with the old, on with the new!" Dorofée bent to a paroxysm of amusement. "Ah, no one of those days but has held something, something just a little farther, for Michael and Paula, Simon. I've seen to that. And Paula's husband has *seen* it—he has seen Michael, I mean, all day and every day. And this week Michael has found it necessary to go twice to the villa, Simon, I suppose because he enjoys *so much* running the car quite alone! I think, Simon my little one, we may safely count on the seventh sin as being disposed of." The curly golden head nodded emphatically. "Yes: I think we may count on that. If only because Michael found forgiveness of the first offence so easy. And to-morrow the husband goes away, and Paula comes here—that husband, Simon, if I had a conscience I should feel sorry for him. He is the only one who is getting nothing out of this interesting game. The rest of us are, each, engaged in our favourite pastime. But the husband is to go away, and Paula will be here for

seven whole days—I mean she will be here forever, don't I, Simon? since Michael is to steal her, since he will refuse to give her back when her husband returns? And by the way, I must start telling Michael about the scent this evening. I must get that idea firm-rooted in his head. Yes," wagged Dorofée's fluffy head decisively, "I must get that started—the idea that the scent, burned in *too large leaves*, will destroy. I will caution Michael about it. I will tell him how, with the two packages so close together on the table (Akmed brought me the larger leaves just as a curiosity, Michael dear), I myself sometimes almost get them mixed." A low rippling laugh broke from the childish red lips. "Ah, it is working so beautifully, so perfectly, I——" she moved suddenly. The blue book fell to the ground.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Sargent"—at the other end of the harbour Guy Templewaite appeared—"they told me you were out here, so I took the liberty of announcing myself. Allow me," he stooped and picked up the little blue book. "You have been writing?"—handing it to her gravely.

"Oh, just scribbling a bit," said Dorofée carelessly; "sit down, do, Mr. Templewaite. You know," with an ingenious smile, "dear Mrs. Tem-

plewaite gave me that book for my birthday, to use as a diary; so I thought I'd write down a few things in it—in case I should die or something." Her shallow little laugh rang out. "Not that my poor bits of thought are worth anything (apologetically), coming just from simple little me."

"I wonder, Mrs. Sargent," said Guy Templewaite, looking at her with his alert hawk-eyes very steady, "if you are so simple as we have been brought to think?"

"But certainly I'm simple," laughed Dorofée, her eyes under the crinkly pompadour shifting suddenly, to meet Simon's—always silently upon her. "I'm just an ordinary, silly little person, Mr. Templewaite—not one bit clever, like Michael and your wife; so I might as well not pretend, might I not?"

"I think so exactly," said Guy, poking the gravel with his stick. "I think you might as well not pretend. Sargent is out?" he asked all at once.

"Yes, Michael has been gone all day, to-day." Dorofée's rose-tinted cheeks looked a little white. "He went to the farms," she added negligently, "alone. He's taken to going even without Akmed, lately—I don't know that I quite like it,

as they've no servants at the villa—only the overseer, and he's off in the vineyards with the men. You know Arabs, Mr. Templewaite, and if they've seen Michael going to that empty house alone—seen even his watch on him as he went ——” the rounded shoulders shrugged expressively. “But Mrs. Templewaite goes to El Nahro alone, doesn't she?” Dorofée remembered suddenly, “and you don't mind that?”

Guy Templewaite looked away from the childish eyes, only to meet those pale grey ones of the Persian cat. He wanted, man that he was, to scream: to turn from that garden and run and run and run! as far away and as fast as his legs would carry him. “Atmosphere,” to Guy Templewaite, meant—in Algiers—the oppression of the sinister. He had come there in the winter to work, and had not yet made money enough to go away. It was for that he was so anxious to see this actor-manager at Gibraltar, for that he wanted passionately to sell his play: to get out of Algiers. And to get Paula out of it. He would never have left her now, could he have afforded to have taken her with him, and had he not felt, besides, that to object to her visit to the Sargents would be to show himself unreasonably suspicious. Torn between all sorts of

emotions, this afternoon before his going away, he had come—as a sort of desperate makeshift—to try to enlist the sympathies of the smiling superficial little woman who now sat opposite him.

“Why didn’t Mrs. Templewaite come with you?” asked the smiling little woman, without waiting for an answer to her other question. “It would have been so nice to have had you both here together for the last time—I mean, on this last day of yours,” she corrected, smoothing her dimity frills.

“Mrs. Templewaite went out,” said Guy tersely; “she will be home to dine with me, however.”

“*Went out?* She had to go out on your last day? Oh, but that was *too* bad.” Dorofée was all sweet sympathy. “It must have been something very important that took her then——”

“Yes—one of her friends, at—at El Nahro, is very ill. She was called to see her.”

“Oh! Called early this morning, I suppose. How very distressing!—and for all day. When she goes to El Nahro, she always goes for all day, doesn’t she?” Only inquiry was in the round upraised eyes.

“Yes,” said Guy shortly, “she is obliged to. It’s an all-day trip.”

"Yes, yes, of course. How stupid of me! I remember now, before when I wanted her to do something—last Tuesday, and then the Friday before that, those lonely days when Michael was away at the farms—both times dear Mrs. Templewaite, too, was gone for all day. I felt so helpless, so restless, you know, with them both away. Mrs. Templewaite has been so sweet and friendly to me all this summer, I've quite grown to depend on her. And it will be *so* nice to have her here. Michael is quite beside himself with joy, even in anticipation. Dear Mr. Templewaite, you are too good to let him have her—I mean they *stimulate* each other so, don't they?"

The pretty, babbling voice might have gone on for ever, had not Guy Templewaite suddenly laid his stick down on the table with a sharp *clack*. "Mrs. Sargent, I want you to listen to me for a minute: I'm going to say some rather unpleasant things to you."

"Oh, please *don't!*" fluttered Dorofée nervously. "I hate unpleasant things. They're so *upsetting*."

"I've learned through a somewhat varied experience," Guy went on, disregarding her completely, "that honesty is the wisest policy. When things get mixed up, it's the only policy. And in

this particular case, Mrs. Sargent, I seem to be the only one who's ready to employ it. We are—you and your husband and Paula and I—dancing on a volcano, whose top is apt to fly off at any moment."

"A volcano?" The white childish brow wrinkled in bewilderment. "I'm afraid I don't understand, Mr. Templewaite."

"I'm afraid you do," said Guy grimly. "I hope you don't. I don't know whether or not you love your husband, Mrs. Sargent—I have neither the desire nor the impertinence to ask—but I (he drew a deep breath) love my wife. And—I—mean—to—keep—her." His brown face held all the iron pugnacity of man primitive.

Dorofée shook her curls into her shining eyes deprecatingly. "But of course you mean to keep her. Why not? Who is to steal her?" Simon, by the bluet bed, ran his pink tongue along his whiskers as though he smiled.

"Nobody," said Guy Templewaite, through closed jaws. "That's just what I mean, Mrs. Sargent. I married Paula"—his sharp face softened indescribably—"she was the sweetest, most unaffected pretty girl I ever saw, when we were married. She wore her hair parted then," he

remembered irrelevantly. "And though some silly people in New York tried to spoil her—talking Bohemian liberty and temperament and all that stuff—to me Paula's never changed. To me she is the wife whom I married," he concluded with a beautiful dignity, "and whom I've loved more every year since. Mrs. Sargent, do you think I'm going to stand by with my hands folded and see Paula fall into the volcano, just by reason of a foolish mis-step? A temporary inability to balance? Not by all the memories I have of her! I'm not."

"No, I know—of course not, Mr. Templewaite," soothed Dorofée, leaning forward to pat his arm; "and it is all so beautiful what you said—especially the volcano part—so poetic and all. But—do tell me—isn't it just a wee bit indelicate in you, that is I mean to say, why do you tell all this to *me*, dear Mr. Templewaite?"

Guy moved sharply, throwing off the dimpled, soothing hand. "I tell it to you, because I hope—I *hoped*—there was enough of the good woman in you, to help. Because I hoped that you, from your side, cared enough to help. Because I've got to go away to-morrow—it's simply unavoidable—and I've got to go away and leave Paula *here*, right on the precipice of any-

thing. So I told you. Not that I think anything could happen—anything horrible I mean—while she is in your house; but—I see the danger—it's a very real danger, and it's that that I want you to help avoid. Perhaps it is indelicate—if it is I don't care a—fig," he ended shortly.

"Leave Paula *here*—leave Mrs. Templewaite here—but why shouldn't you? And why do you call her being here, with us, in Michael's house and mine, being on a precipice, Mr. Templewaite? Really I don't think that's quite kind. I don't think Michael would think it was kind!"

"Oh, damn Michael!" cried Templewaite exasperatedly. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Sargent, but can't you see—it's he, it's your husband, who's making the precipice? Paula——"

"*My husband—Michael?*" With the enormous dignity of a very tiny person, Dorofée rose. "Mr. Templewaite, I think you are forgetting yourself. I think you are forgetting I am Michael's wife. And though I may be very young and silly, I am not so silly that you can make me believe that Michael has any but the very kindest, the very highest and most noble feeling for your wife. I have never seen him when he was not looking for her every comfort ("Exactly!" bolted Guy), when he was not mi-

nutely studying her happiness, and now, the day before she is to come here and visit us, you come and make this awful—this cruelly suspicious charge against Michael! Mr. Templewaite, I can't believe it of you!" Like a sorrowful, avenging fairy, she stood regarding him.

"I don't make a charge against him," returned Guy, also standing. "I simply say that for Paula—for a person of her highly impressionable nature—he is a very dangerous man. And I came here not to tell you my suspicions, but to ask you while Paula is here to help her avert that danger. To be with her, with them, as much as possible——"

"Ah! I see. It was to warn me against your wife, then, that you came!" As though instinctively, Dorofée brushed her rose-sprigged skirts away from the table he was touching. "You came to rouse *my* suspicions—against that poor, beautiful, gifted creature who has been so much—such an infinity—to Michael! You wish me to follow them about, to spy upon them. I am sorry for you, Mr. Templewaite,"—her small figure stiffened majestically—"you have come to the wrong person."

"I see I have," said Guy rigidly, taking up his hat; "I can only hope that you will be as wholly

compensated for your exalted attitude, Mrs. Sargent, as I have been for the motive that led me here. Good afternoon."

"It does no good to sneer at me," rebuked Dorofée, as he bowed to her. "I dare say your motive, misguided as it was, held the seed of a good intention. Good afternoon, Mr. Templewaite. If I don't see you again," she called after him suddenly, "knowing you has been *most* interesting."

"And that is quite true, Simon, my angel," as Templewaite's stiff shoulders disappeared within the inner court; "it has been *most* interesting. It will have been more interesting when I detail that last conversation to Paula, to-morrow." Dorofée wrinkled up her tiny nose in an access of enjoyment. "When I tell Paula all about her husband's cruel suspicions, and how staunchly, how loyally I defended her! Oh la! la!" Again the low, delicious chuckle. "When I tell her, timidly but quite positively, that I think it really dangerous to live with such a man—he might, out of his insane jealousy, even *murder* her! Murder her—you hear, Simon? Murder her, ha! ha!" The frilly rose dimity bunched itself into a paroxysm of amusement.

Then, looking up, Dorofée saw Akmed—he

seemed always to appear out of nowhere—standing with his gleaming smile before her. “Ah you, Akmed!” she spoke to him in French. “And what have you—letters?”

“A telegram, madame, it came just now from the post.” He handed it to her impressively, and stood against the arbour, watching while she read it. He was very gorgeous to-day, Akmed: he had been to the kinematograph theatre in the Rue Bab Azoun, and he wore a marvellous costume of orange and blue stripes, with a wide scarlet sash under the short jacket. His fez was perched to one side of his head, and his tiny curving moustache lent him an air of absurd childishness. He bit a fat red rose between his teeth as he watched Dorofée. The Spirit of Silence watched him.

“H—m.” Slowly, very slowly, Dorofée folded the telegram. “Mother very ill. Could you come if necessary?” she repeated in English—which Akmed did not understand. “I ask you, Simon, did a Boston person ever make herself conspicuous at the artistic time?—Michael’s mother getting ill, and sending for him, perhaps, just at the climax of his degeneration! How like her—to demand him exactly when I want him. Two weeks ago, now, I’d have rejoiced to have

got rid of him. But—just now”—she fitted the ends of the torn blue paper together—“Michael stays here, my dear mother-in-law! And this”—with an almost insipid smile—it was so babyish, so innocent—“shall stay *here*,” placing the telegram carefully in the back of the little blue book. “It will make a nice postscript, no matter who reads the book. It will explain why Michael never answered. But I shall still keep my dedication just the same,”—she turned toward Akmed with serene deliberation—“for I don’t believe Michael’s mother will die. I never heard of a Boston person’s dying, did you, Simon? They’re all Christian Scientists.—*Eh bien, Akmed, c’est tout! Il n’y a pas de réponse.*”

“*Non, madame?*” Akmed’s white, white teeth still bit the red rose. “Madame, I have arranged for the maid, Amande. I have got her a place as waitress in the Café du Soleil. The patron expects her to come in to-night.”

“Ah!” Dorofée sat forward with interest. “And is it a good place, will Amande like it—the Café du Soleil?”

“Madame, I think it is a good place. There are many officers, and tourists from the ships, and Irene, the other waitress there, seems very happy. She wears the Turkish dress. If Amande

will like it?" He shrugged, caressing the remains of his red rose. "Who can say, madame? I do not know."

"I see—and she will wear the Turkish dress." Dorofée's eyes were fixed on the pink and mauve butterfly. She knew what the Turkish dress was—in a restaurant 'where there were many officers.' "Er—where did you say Amande lived, before she came here, Akmed?"

"Madame, she lived in the Rue Ballay with a French family. She was *gouvernante* to the children."

"Ah!" For some reason Dorofée clapped her dimpled little hands. "She was *gouvernante*, delicious! She, too—exquisite!"

Akmed regarded her tranquilly, his blue and orange stripes brilliant in the bath of the setting sun. "Amande had to leave that family, since her madame went to live in France again. And she came to the house of my brother-in-law's cousin, to lodge, till she could find work. Amande's mother and her mother's mother are dead," said Akmed, leaning down to caress the Spirit of Silence; "they died two years ago, in the great plague. Amande now is alone." The Spirit of Silence reached out with a cat's swiftness and scratched the Arab, scratching him long

and deep, down the length of his subtle brown hand. "So I brought her here to madame," continued Akmed, wiping away the blood, with a sunny smile. "Madame has found her useful?"

"Very useful—Simon, *petit frère du diable!* Come here and sit under the table!—very useful, Akmed. Only now I am to have a guest, and—I need some one older, more experienced than Amande."

"I understand, madame. So Amande will go to-night to the Café du Soleil. The patron says she may lodge there also." The sun in the west was almost dead: its radiance had faded to a dim pathetic pink—almost a dirty pink. Akmed arranged his sash, gently content with himself.

"You have told her? Yes? That is right. Then she will go this evening—after monsieur comes home, I dare say." Dorofée glanced up at the Arab with her most vacant doll-expression. "Monsieur is late this evening, Akmed; I think I will not wait in the garden. I will go inside. And oh—Akmed," as she rose, the little person seemed to remember something she had wanted to say before, "I hope you will be *very* nice to the new lady who comes to-morrow—to monsieur's—and my—guest. Ve-ry nice, you un-

derstand, Akmed? I want the new lady to be *very* happy here."

"I understand, madame,"—Akmed's dark, dark eyes met the grey ones with a steady tranquillity—"I will remember."

He moved along after her, as she left the arbour—a tall barbaric shadow, back of the wee, rose-sprigged figure; while last of all, behind him, came Simon—his grey majestic tail pointing straight upward, his soft grey paws padding silently down the flowered vista. As they came under Dorofée's room, "You burn the scent always, *Ashes of Incense?*" asked Akmed, his fine nostrils dilated a little. Unconsciously, he spoke in Arabic.

"Yes," said Dorofée with that slow smile that Michael had never seen, "it is a good scent, Akmed. It gives me pleasant dreams."

"That is nice." Akmed showed every white tooth. "That is very nice. Allah gives wisdom to those who have pleasant dreams."

"Yes. But Akmed—why did Maaz tie up the smaller packet in scarlet? *Why?*"

"Ashes of Incense, how do I know? In Persia scarlet is the colour of mourning, the colour of death. But why did Maaz tie the smaller

packet in scarlet? I do not know, little Shadow of Allah."

"Ah!" Little Shadow of Allah curled her rosebud mouth into the veriest speck of expression and went within the house, carrying the pale blue book carefully—so that a paper placed inside could not fall out.

Upstairs, in her white beribboned room, she found N'ala opening the persiennes after the sunset. "N'ala, has the new maid come?" she asked carelessly, putting away her writing things, while Simon stalked over to his cushion by the window.

"Yes, madame, she has come."

"And is Amande ready to go?"

"Yes, madame, Amande is ready."

"N'ala, does Amande weep?" Still caressingly the soft little voice questioned on.

"No, madame, Amande does not weep," said the old Arab woman, always in monotonous repetition. "Amande has sat all day with a little silver ring in her hand. She does not weep, madame."

"Um-m. That is very interesting—I mean I am very glad of that, N'ala. You may go now—no, do not take away the incense jar. I wish to burn more."

In the blue and white room—more, all over the house—the heavy, cloyant fragrance of the ash-scent clung to everything. One could not get away from it—as Michael reminded Dorofée rather impatiently that night, after dinner.

They were sitting in the salon downstairs, Dorofée writing, writing steadily; her cloudy childish head bent absorbedly over a pale blue book. Michael—staring moodily over a volume he was pretending to read—had to speak to her twice before she answered him. “Eh? Er—what did you say, dear?” Dorofée looked up vaguely. (In the little blue book she had just written ‘and one of the first lessons in irritation, is absent-mindedness, when the person speaks to one. It exasperates; so I shall use it.’)

“I say, do for goodness’ sake stop burning that vile scent,” repeated Michael petulantly. “I can’t get it out of my system. And I know it will disgust Paula.” It was ‘Paula,’ without apology, by this time.

“You can’t what, dear?” again Dorofée glanced up absently. “Ah—get it out of your system? I’m so sorry, Michael dear. No—I suppose you can’t.” She stared at the little blue book thoughtfully. “And you think it will dis-

gust Paula? Ah, I hardly think that, Michael dear. I think, in the end"—the sweet voice slackened rather—"Paula will grow to *like* that scent. I really do, Michael."

"Well, *I* won't, anyway," growled Michael—who as the result of conversation at the dinner-table (anent 'that rude Mr. Templewaite's *horrid* insinuations—oh no, Michael, I would never repeat to you what the wretched, jealous man said!') was in a superlatively bad humour. "Especially since you say the stuff's poison—too much of it."

"Eh, what?"

"Since you say it's poison. Do, for God's sake, *listen*, Dolly."

"Oh, but only the *large* leaves are poison," said Dorofée distinctly, as a teacher teaches a lesson, "and the large leaves are in the small packet tied in scarlet. There's no danger, Michael; I've told the servants not to touch any of it. And I'll tell Paula. All about it." Dorofée's words came in disconnected jerks: she was writing, busily.

(Oh yes, I'll tell Paula! Paula shall know, even before you, mother-in-law! And he—your dear good boy, brought up as a devout Churchman, has just said 'for God's sake'—over a sim-

ple affair, a request to listen to him, mercy. Oh la! la! *where* is his conscience?)

"I wonder how your mother is, Michael?" said Dorofée, with sudden irrelevance.

"I don't know, I'm sure," returned Michael briefly. What on earth made Dolly think of his mother? He himself was not over keen for thinking of her, to-night. Dolly certainly rambled.

"I hope she is well," said Dorofée sincerely. "You must often long to see her, don't you, Michael?"

"Yes, yes—of course. Go on with your writing, Dolly, do. I want to read. Oh, by the way!"—as the small golden head bent obediently again—"Paula has promised to help me with a new edition of the *Industries* while she's here. There are some corrections I want to make, and she's promised to help me. So you won't have to bother about her in the mornings," said Michael benevolently. "We'll work in my study."

"Where did you say, Michael dear?—oh, in your study. That will be splendid, won't it? So shut off and by yourselves, I'm sure you will accomplish *great things*. And Paula is going to help you—I call that simply *sweet* of her. And by this time she must know a great deal about fruit farms—I mean she's been in Algiers since

last December, hasn't she?" Dorofée raised angelic, limpid eyes. "And she's so clever—she grasps things so *completely*."

"Yes"—Michael's handsome, narrow face was dull brick red—"as—as you say, she does get hold of a subject like lightning, Dolly. I—I think she can help me tremendously." He drew a very long breath, and retired behind his *Industries*.

Dorofée wrote on.

Nine o'clock struck, and half past. In the court outside the salon the little fountain plashed incessantly. From somewhere came the thin sound of an Arab flute. Michael, from behind his book, shivered unaccountably. He was used enough to the Arab night-noises; but somehow to-night—— He looked up with a start, and saw standing in the doorway—Amande.

She was in dark, inconspicuous clothes—the short bolero and slim skirt she always wore. Her beautiful head was draped in a black scarf, and in her hand she carried a cotton-knotted bundle: all she possessed. When Michael saw her, she dropped the bundle and came forward, kneeling silently at his feet, and carrying his hand to her forehead, after the manner of the Arab servants. She did not look at him, nor yet at Dorofée, her mistress, as she knelt before her, afterwards. She

was about to go out, as she had come in—silently—when Dorofée with a gentle word stopped her.

“Amande! You have forgotten something.”

The girl turned slowly; as one who has gone through his inferno hears himself recalled.

“Madame?”

“You have forgotten—the little silver ring upon your hand—the ring monsieur gave you. You will give it to me, yes? I shall like it to give to my other maid, and—at the Café du Soleil, you will not miss it. They will give you lots of rings. That is it?—thank you.”

The girl had dropped the silver circlet in the tiny outstretched hand, without a word, without the sign of an emotion. Only when Michael exclaimed, “The Café du Soleil? Dorofée! what do you mean?” Only then did Amande turn her still, white face full upon him, with one long expressive look. Michael’s conscience roused itself to run knives through him, with that look. He saw the ring in Dorofée’s hand, and it seemed to hang tight round his neck, choking him.

In another minute, Amande was gone.

“Dorofée!” Michael turned to his wife excitedly—it was only at moments of highest pitch that he called her full name. “Amande at the Café du Soleil!—it’s impossible. You don’t

know—that place—it can't be allowed!" He had started up to go after Amande.

"*Dearest Michael*," soothed the purring voice, "you told me to find Amande a place—not just to turn her out into the street—and Akmed had a great deal of trouble in getting *anything*. Surely she will not be so badly off, and—I think you would not like her here when Paula comes, would you?"

Michael sank back into his chair. His face was pale. "No," he stammered. "No," you're right, Dolly. Not when Paula comes. I—Paula's so quick to guess anything, you know, and—she has such high ideas, I——"

"I understand perfectly, Michael dear," said Dorofée with a divine sweetness in her smile; "now go on with your book. Amande will be all right."

Michael went on with his book; his pale face gradually regaining its colour. After all he supposed Dorofée was right—such a warm-hearted, sympathetic little creature must be—and the girl would probably be all right. Michael sighed—more peacefully.

The last words Dorofée wrote in the pale blue book that night were: "I believe Michael's conscience will soon stop erupting altogether."

IV

"I AM going to put you in this room, Paula dear (after considerable persuasion, Dorofée had been induced to overcome her awe of dear *clever* Mrs. Templewaite sufficiently to say 'Paula'), because I think it just suits you."

"It is very nice," said Paula graciously. By this time she had rather forgotten it was Dolly who had shown her how it was her part in life to bring love to all the world—all the men in the world, that is. She had forgotten that it was Dolly also who so appreciated her (Paula's) complex nature as to see that no one person could ever understand that nature. Paula had a slippery memory; and she was disposed once more to be just a little condescending to "simple little Dolly—poor, brilliant Michael's wife."

"Yes, Dolly, it is very nice. I'll just sit down and rest a bit before my trunks come." She arranged her pink sheath carefully in a low upholstered chair. She was a big woman: the chairs in this soft faïenced old room had not been built for big women.

"It was called the Room of the Favourites, this." Dorofée sat down too—a white, blue-ribboned speck—swinging her bits of feet joyously, like a happy child. "You see, Paula, the Sultan who used to live in this palace had those rooms over there—where Michael has his study now—and he used to keep his five favourite wives in here. Two of them slept in that niche (the fluffy head nodded toward an L at one end of the room), and two in this"—nodding toward the other. "Then here, in the middle, the widest and most comfortable, slept *the one—la première!* And she changed *every day!*" Dorofée laughed deliciously. "Not very constant, was he, the wicked old man? I believe even a man of this generation would stay fascinated by a woman as long as a week or two—don't you, Paula?"

"Certainly he would," declared Paula with decision. "But all that is very interesting, Dolly. Tell me, has any one slept here since you had the place?"

"Oh, yes!" The child wagged its curly head sagely. "I have slept here—when I first came, and my room was being done over, and Amande has slept here—when she first came. Amande was a maid I had, you know, but not an Arab—a half-caste. She didn't like sleeping in the serv-

ants' quarters, so I put her in here, since the room 'hen wasn't furnished or anything."

"I see." Paula gazed at the soft peacock-tailed linen of the chairs and cushions approvingly.

"And now you are to sleep here," concluded Dorofée, smiling, "for a while. Yes, I think you will like this room. I think it suits you. And the middle niche is ve-ry comfortable. I know, for I have slept there."

"Such a quaint place, the whole house." Paula, still a shade condescending, was walking about—examining the beautiful fluted marble pillars, that joined the fan shaped arches of the old tiled ceiling with the floor. "That *sweet* open court, and the long passages leading round and out from it—you say that is Michael's room?" She stopped a moment by the door of her own, looking just next, down the gallery.

"That is his study," corrected Dorofée carefully; "his room is farther on, with a dressing-room between. It will be nice for you, being so near his study, won't it, Paula—as Michael says you are going to work together now?"

"To work together now?" Paula repeated the innocent words absently. She was taking off her hat before an old silver mirror, and was rather

occupied. Red, red hair above rose-pink linen *did* give forth the inner sense. (Of what? I don't know. Not colour, I should say, however.) "Yes—yes, Dolly, I did say I'd help him with his work,"—Paula turned round again—"I shall be, oh so happy to! You can't know, little Dolly (her voice was so full, its low notes quite brimmed over), what Michael has been to me—you can't know."

"I suppose I can't," said little Dolly, patting the cushions of *la première's* niche, "but *dearest* Paula, I can *guess*. Knowing both you and Michael—oh, from a great distance, yes!—but knowing you are both geniuses, and—er—misunderstood—'alone, misunderstood,' oh I think that is so *beautiful*—I can guess. I can guess what it must be to 'yet find one who lonely too, reached out and took your hand.' And that's what I told Mr. Templewaite yesterday," she concluded.

"You told Guy? What do you mean, Dolly?" Paula sat down suddenly. Her face between the pink linen and red hair, looked rather pale.

"Why, I told him I thought you and Michael were a great deal to each other, just as you've said." Dorofée regarded her with a child's frankness. "And that we—he and I—ought to be very glad and pleased that it is so. I told

him I thought he was very foolish—cruelly foolish—to take the extraordinary stand he does.”

“I—I—just what stand do you mean, Dolly darling?” The full voice was unnaturally thin and shrill.

“Why the stand—no, Paula, I can’t tell you.” Dorofée knelt down impulsively by the pink linen sheath and put her arms about the figure inside it. “You poor beautiful thing, I couldn’t tell you, really. It’s too sordid—you’re too far above.”

“Then I know,” said Paula, sharply—for a genius and a ‘thing above’—“I know, Dolly, and it decides me. Yes, this is the last; this decides me. I am glad Guy has gone to Gibraltar, for _____”

“Yes?” The little face beneath Paula’s was almost insipid in its innocent query.

“I must make some plan.” Paula rose out of the twining arms abruptly. “I must make some new arrangement. I’m being persecuted—the spirit crushed out of me. Yes. This can’t go on any longer.”

“Dear Paula, do tell me what’s troubling you?” Dorofée followed her pleadingly to where she stood at the far end of the room. “If it’s something I can help——”

"No, no, Dolly. It's nothing you would understand, you poor baby. You know nothing of the agonies of living with a jealous man, you fortunate little child. You are married to one of the rare souls of the earth, and—yes, I must talk to Michael. Perhaps he can suggest something."

"I'm sure he can," said Dorofée with beautiful conviction. "I shall tell him to come to you in the garden, yes? And Paula, you poor darling,"—again the caressing dimpled arms went about the crushed spirit in strawberry,—"though I can't understand—I'm such a silly, stupid little thing!—I want you to know that you can stay here in this house as long as ever you like. "*I*"—with unmistakable sincerity—"hope you will stay here *always*."

Paula kissed her silently—a melancholy, hopeless kiss—as though she had lived a long time. Then Dorofée went away, to send Michael.

"And they are sitting now in the garden," wrote Dorofée in the little blue book an hour later, "but *quite* far away from my window, in the arbour; and I think—I am sure Michael is *suggesting* something! Oh, the exquisite unconscious way they work in with me! I am certain, mother-in-law, that when you read this book, you

will agree that even for clever people, they have been unusually stupid. For though you too have thought me married to one of the rare souls of the earth (*mon Dieu!* one hopes so!), by this time you are half way through my book, and you know exactly how much the 'poor baby' has 'understood.' One thing you cannot know, though: How I have revelled in making that woman make a fool of me—that, to my amusement, is the very height of subtlety. It proves one's vanity—the ordinary woman's assassin—really subordinate. The only rebellion my vanity would ever show, would be if I were laughed at. You think that is funny, mother-in-law? No: because people do not laugh at me. They laugh at (and cry over) great things—things they worship and adore; they *smile*, indulgently, at a Dolly! And it is well. For if they laughed at me, it would wreck everything; I should go crazy, and give up my secret. A person with a colossal sense of humour cannot bear to be laughed at: it is his one vanity to keep himself from being a joke. Though to *himself*, contradictorily, he is the divinest joke under heaven! Enough for now, mother-in-law. Simon is standing nearer to me than usual, so I know he wants a saucer of milk. And then I must go and tell Paula about

the scent—I forgot it this morning, we were so deep in the affairs of the Sultan and la première! And this afternoon I intend to burn quite a *large* leaf, out of the smaller leaves, and see what I dream—while Michael and Paula are taking the siesta!—The other day I had a very beautiful dream. It was about a masque I went to, at the *Prince George* last winter, and—no, mother-in-law, the man was not Michael. He was a *man*—who could break one with his little finger if he chose. Ah, if Michael had been like that, I—but I’m being absurd, no? At all events, I think it will be a fascinating way to be murdered.”

Dorofée locked the little blue book into her intricate white desk, and went downstairs—as daintily charming a figure in her frilly frock, as one might wish to see. Whom Michael and Paula, however, did not seem particularly pleased to see. During the next three days (as Michael more than once told himself impatiently) they did not seem to be able to have a continuous conversation—a serious, profitable conversation, on such subjects as Man’s Duty to Himself, the Individual Law, Higher Liberty, etc., without Dorofée’s incessant interrupting. The child chattered so. He—Michael—had never known her to be so shallow; but he saw now that she was shallow.

And sometimes he looked at Paula, with a great wistfulness (that was what Michael called it, you understand) and sighed. He began now to regret his marriage—to regret it bitterly. He saw that after all his mother had been right, that she had seen that he was failing in his duty to himself, that he was injuring his inner good. But (with a doubtful glance at Paula's Titian-bandaged head) would his mother see that he was right, now? Would she read his troubled, yearning soul and understand? Michael doubted it. Few people in the Outer World could understand; in that, as he frequently said, lay Life's Tragedy.

And Paula's husband (who was emphatically too far out in the Outer World to understand) Michael considered another tragedy. He was convinced that Paula was entirely right to have made up her mind (with Michael's help) not to go back to him. A material, gross-minded man like that, who saw in a—er—very spiritual union of souls only a coarse low attraction, did not deserve such a wife as Paula. She should belong to—here modesty deprecatingly drew the curtain. No, Paula should stay on at the villa as long as she would, until she could form her plans definitely. Michael supposed Guy Templewaite

would be nasty about it, but that was Guy's affair, and Paula's. He (thankfully) would have nothing to do with that. Meantime the situation had its, ah—temptations. (Temptations no longer, my dear Michael; say rather, facts.) And the one outstanding certainty, was that Dolly was very much in the way.

In "Dolly's" little blue book the pages were filling up. In the back still lay the telegram which she had sealed together and pasted in neatly. "And I don't think you are dead," she wrote cheerfully to mother-in-law, "or in spite of our silence we should have heard about it. I hope you aren't dead, for I am writing this story mostly for your benefit—and Michael's. Michael and Paula are in the study, now, *working*. When I asked Michael at dinner last night how far they had got, he said 'oh, quite far—quite far.' I think that is true. For last night, after I went up to bed, I heard their voices in the arbour, and Paula's—all strangled and torn with temperament saying, 'Oh, Michael, I can't stand it any longer. I can't, I can't! You must do something—you must think of something. Tell the poor silly little thing the truth.' Ah, but Paula, my dear, a person who is losing his conscience forgets how to tell the truth. He remembers how

to do only those things he wants to do. And Michael does not want to tell me the truth; he wants to get rid of me. *Tout autre chose!* Well, he shall get rid of me. I'm drilling him about it daily, and as soon as the husband gets back, and Paula refuses to return to him (by that time Michael too will refuse to give her up to him), as soon as I can have proved to myself that he has committed the sixth as well as the seventh sin, then he shall do the eighth; and the sooner the better—the more artistic. For myself I shall be rejoiced: I am getting rather weary of this Dolly mask. Ah, but mother-in-law, there is to be just one thing—I am to have just one marvellous time before—but of that, and that only, you will know nothing. I shall become, if only for one hour, the thing I have longed to be; the thing that really, instead of this cold brain I am, I was meant to be—that I could have been, if Michael, instead of evaporating into cleverness, had become a wonderful brute. Yes, mother-in-law, a *brute*—a creature of fierce, beautiful mastery, like—— But of that I shall tell no one; only Simon. I wonder if out there—in that delicious space where I am going, to laugh and laugh and laugh—I shall still have Simon? I have always had Simon; I have had three of him.

There must be six more, at least; of the Spirit of Silence. I should miss Simon, even where I had the eternal privilege of laughing. *Eh bien!* Four more days and the husband will be back; then we shall finish things quickly. He could not write, of course, the husband, but he has sent three telegrams—long ones. Akmed brought them to me, as usual, and I handed them to Paula—each one; standing by, sympathetically, while she read. At the end of the last one she cried ‘Rubbish!’ and then looked up to remember me, and added freezingly ‘goodness gracious, Dolly, you seem always to be about. Can’t I even read a telegram without your espionage?’ Slow, wounded tears fell down my cheeks (I learned that for Michael long ago) as I turned and went into the house. To a guilty person, tears on the part of an *innocent*—innocent, oh la! la!—are the last straw of exasperation. Paula, I am sure, is quite ready to murder me. But she shan’t: she shall only know about it, and approve. Abet, first; then approve. I took Michael into my room this afternoon (‘You haven’t been near me since Paula came, you bad, neglectful boy!’) and while he was there, showed him casually just how close those two packets lie together on the table by my bed. ‘I burn it every night now,’ I told

him, 'the scent. It brings me pleasant dreams, so I burn it every night. He will remember—later. As a matter of fact, these dreams, if nothing else, are worth all my trouble. I am growing to live my real life in them already. And one day soon, they will slip into an endless Dream—ah! When that comes!"

The next day—the fourth after Paula's arrival—Dorofée announced after breakfast that she was going to drive out to the fruit farms. "You and Paula are so busy with your work," she told Michael sweetly, "and I know I bother you all the time, interrupting. So I'm going to give you a whole long day to yourselves; while I (she shook her curls into her delighted eyes) go out to interview Hassan." Hassan was the overseer at the farms. Dorofée said his name lingeringly to the two, as though she liked it.

"Oh—er—I wouldn't go out there to-day, "Dolly," said Michael, looking neither at her nor Paula. "It's awfully hot, and besides, there's nobody out there. It isn't safe."

"I know there's nobody out there," returned his wife serenely; "only—Hassan. But I shall have Akmed, you know; *I* never drive to the fruit farms alone. For me they'll be quite safe."

"Oh, well, if you're going to be stubborn about

it!" flung out Michael. Paula rose majestically and left the room. "It does seem, Dolly, as though you spend your time just hunting ways to be annoying!"

"I'm sorry I don't please you, Michael," said Dorofée, with two instant sorrowful tears. "I do try, I try my best; but I'm so stupid, so unfitted to be the wife of a strong, clever man like you——"

"I'm beginning to believe you are," muttered Michael savagely, kicking his paper out of the way as he too rose. Dolly going to the fruit farms to interview Hassan—oh, good Lord!

"I say I should think you might have some respect for my wishes, and stay at home to-day," he said in answer to Dorofée's look of inquiry over his mutterings. "Whatever possesses you to want to go to the fruit farms?"

"Dear Michael, don't you think I too want to know something of the work you are doing?" The honeyed voice was gently reproachful. "You don't want to shut me entirely out of your life, do you, dear—even if I am silly and simple about things?"

Michael grunted. Yes, brought up on Beacon Hill, he grunted.

"You see, dearest, when Paula is gone you might want me to help you."

Dolly to help him—great heavens!—Dolly! When Paula was gone—the suggestion made him actually resentful. Why should Paula go? If she had left Templewaite and was happy here with him—with them, Michael corrected hastily—No. Paula should not go. He would not allow her to go. He——

‘So you understand, Michael, don’t you?’ Dorofèe reached up her arms to him angelically. “And you won’t be nervous while I am gone to-day? That’s right. Good-bye, darling.” She kissed him with a throttling tenderness. “And I shall leave Simon to keep you and Paula company. To look after you,” playfully.

“Oh, damn the cat!” Michael was out of all patience. With every nerve on edge, Simon, only next to Dorofèe herself, exasperated him. “I beg your pardon, Dolly, but you know I can’t bear that cat. There, run on—if you will go. Good-bye.”

“The Arabs call him the Spirit of Silence, did you know?” asked Dorofèe, leaving the room leisurely; “yes, Michael, I know that you can’t bear him. But he won’t hurt you, and he never meows. Good-bye, you dear clever boy!”

With a joyous skip, she was off upstairs; and a few minutes later sitting beside Akmed in the

car. Michael and Paula, from the garden, heard them honk-honk down the street outside; and looked at one another silently, helplessly. But while Michael was cursing the negligence that had kept him from establishing a telephone at Villa des Fruits—though even if there were a 'phone, he reflected angrily, what good would it do? With Hassan a quarter of a mile away, in the vineyards?—Michael's Mercédès was resting in the garage at the foot of the hill leading toward Akmed's brother-in-law's cousin's, an empty covered basket on its step, while curled up on a bench in the crowded coffee-house above, a tiny Arab woman sat, her pale long eyes strangely content, as she ate the sticky kous-kous.

That was the day Michael decided something had to happen. As something was, very evidently, going to happen—when Dorofée should return from interviewing Hassan—this may not seem so original with Michael. But when a person's conscience goes under an opiate, his activity is almost certain to go with it. He does nothing: he simply waits and lets things happen—to roll over him like a wave, carrying him with it, or leaving him where he was, as it will—he acquiesces. Michael however was frightened; and he was resentful. Dolly, he argued, was getting a perfect

nuisance—a dangerous nuisance. He had read in the paper that morning how a man in Marseilles killed his wife for no other reason than that she worried the life out of him, nagging him. That was unreasonable, of course, wild (a month ago Michael would have said “terrible”), but he could understand how the man felt. It was simply the desperate desire to get rid of her. Especially if she went prying into his affairs, wanting to know everything about his work and that.

“I must do something about Dolly,” Michael said to Paula.

“Indeed, Michael, I think you must,” confirmed Mrs. Templewaite. (In the eyes of the law and a few other inconsequentialities, she was still Mrs. Templewaite.) “I do not see how we can bear with her much longer.” They were sitting in the cool seclusion of the Sultan’s room—in Michael’s study.

“It’s odd,” Michael forgot his irritation for a moment, to ponder, “I used not to notice this shallowness in her. Why, when we were first married——”

“Ah, but”—fancy beginning on ‘when we were first married,’ to the woman with whom you are—well, supposed to be trying to forget that you are married! Oh, these men, the cleverest of

them!—"but one never stays 'just married,' does one, Michael dearest?" Paula's voice was honey with suggestion. "One grows—it is inevitable. One follows oneself (she paused to get the full effect of that—rather neat, she thought it), and one brings up—alas, some of us, I fear, in mere vapidity, as you have said."

"Ah, but some of us"—retaliated Michael, taking one of the long, temperamental hands (although the study was large, there seemed to be no two chairs in it very far apart)—"some of us blossom into goddesses!" he whispered, catching the goddess to him in a quite material embrace. "When that happens, Paula, who can resist?"

Paula beamed. Then, her face sobering, "But I believe you really want to resist, Michael, all the time. You—sometimes you seem so half-hearted about things; you hesitate, and seem to stop and think—oh, I don't know what it is, but if I thought you didn't really love me——"

There were moments when the language of the Higher Plane—yes, and the transcendentalism of it—fell from Paula, and she thought in just plain man-and-woman emotions.

Michael too. "But I do love you," he protested (thereby, as many men could have told him,

signing the death-warrant of his love for her); "I love you devotedly, crazily—what haven't I done that I could do, to show you?"

She drew away from him; looked at him steadily, almost calculatingly. "You haven't—taken me away from Guy. Nor—you haven't—got rid of Dolly."

Michael shifted. "But—but, Paula *dearest*, I have taken you away from Guy—haven't I promised that you shall never go back to him? And as for Dolly——" His face darkened.

"Yes," said Paula eagerly, "as for Dolly—what? Don't you see, what's the good of keeping me here, with Dolly always about? We can't even talk without her insipid little laugh always interrupting. And when it comes to *living* (naturally Paula meant living in the latter-day novelist's interpretation of the word), why it's—it's perfectly impossible, that's all."

As a matter of fact, it had not been so perfectly impossible; but that is a detail.

"Isn't there some one we could get to interest Dolly?" wondered Paula, who, she often declared, was nothing if not modern in her solutions of things. "That would be it, Michael! Some nice, easy-going man who——"

"My dear Paula, I hardly think an easy-going

man would appeal to Dolly"—Michael did not add 'after me': *he* was nothing if not sensitive. "I have never known Dolly to show the slightest interest in a man, except,"—a sudden thought arrested him—"yes I did, just once. But that was an Arab—a nigger I call 'em—you know him, Barali, who lives up there on the hill. Dolly met him at the masque last winter."

"Yes? and what did she say?" Paula was leaning forward, intent. She did not recoil from Arab men as 'niggers': no woman does—unless she comes to know them too well. "Was she really interested? what did she say?"

"Oh, she didn't say so very much—it wasn't what she said, but the way I found them there together, when I went to look for Dolly to go home. They were—well, I could see that she was very much interested. Her voice (I caught a few words as I went out on to the balcony) was different from what I had ever heard it; low and—then they were talking in Arabic. Dolly knows a lot of that, you know."

"H—m." It always rather piqued Paula—that tone in Michael's voice when he mentioned anything that might be considered an accomplishment of Dolly's. "You thought

there might be, as they say at home, something doing?"

"No,"—Michael looked disgusted—"certainly not. Dolly—and a nigger? Paula!"

"But Barali's completely Europeanized," she protested; "he has that wonderful modern villa, and he keeps no harem, not even one wife, they say, and—really, Michael, I have never been able to understand the prejudice you and Guy feel for Arabs."

"You and Guy!" She would just repay him for a few of those 'when we were first marrieds,' Paula thought.

"I can have no idea, naturally, what your husband thinks of Arabs," said Michael stiffly; "for myself, I know I think 'em niggers, and nothing else. Barali's father is a marabout—one of the most powerful men in North Africa—and one of the fiercest against Westerners. But as for considering such a thing as Barali and Dolly—it's monstrous, it's simply absurd! I'm sorry I even mentioned that one meeting—she's never laid eyes on him nor spoken of him since—it just popped into my head when you asked about Dolly and other men."

"Oh!" Paula sat back, disappointed. Then,

watching his face that she had come to know, "But think!" she said, "even now Dolly's out at the farms, asking Hassan—one of those niggers—about us, you and me!"

Michael swore. Nor did he apologize. "Yes—you're right. Something's got to be done. Well"—bracing himself—"I'm ready, anything you say I'll do."

"*Anything*, Michael? Do you mean that?"

"Yes," said Michael, his handsome face a little pale.

"Then—send Dolly away. Free yourself, and me—free us, I say," and Paula's voice was firmer and less full than he had ever heard it. "It's the only way, Michael; as things are, you and I are mere puppets (again Paula paused, to get the benefit of her earnest eloquence; as she did so, she caught sight of Simon over by the window: he was running his tongue along his cheek as though he smiled—Paula scowled at him.) "Mere puppets to Dolly's whims," she finished, "and when you send her away, I hope you'll send that cat with her. I can't bear him in the room with me!"

"Nor I," echoed Michael, almost as passionately. "He makes my flesh creep—though it's only lately," he remembered. "I used not to mind him."

"Oh, 'used not—used not;—what had all that to do with what is?" demanded Paula, at the end of her nerves. "I say something's got to be done; you say you'll do it. Very well. Let's get the thing over. Now where can you send Dolly? She has no family, nor any friends away from here—you can't just turn her out into the street, you know."

Michael moved uncomfortably in his chair. He thought with sudden poignancy of another woman of whom those words had been said to him: "you told me to find her a place, not just to turn her out into the street." And though in the presence of his goddess, his *alter ego*, Michael suffered a very bad moment. It is a fact that one miserably multiplies experience in dealing with women. The same situations repeat themselves—*ad nauseam*. Michael turned despondently to Paula; who repented her sharpness, took his head in her arms and kissed him. Also *ad felicitatem!*

"My beautiful one! (catching her to him with ardour). Yes, that is it: where to send the foolish little thing. I'm sure I don't know, I——"

"Dearest," breathed the beautiful one—as well as she could breathe—"tell me this: if I think of a plan will you consent to it? Will you do ex-

actly as I say, when I have come to a decision? Will you?"

Michael hesitated. He did not quite like giving things so entirely into the hands of a woman: it looked incompetent, it looked—he did not like to add, weak. Besides, Dolly—though she irritated him beyond measure, worried him almost to the limit of slapping her sometimes, he could not altogether forget that time when they 'were first married.' It rose up to remind him: a time of strange—to Michael, hitherto and since—unknown happiness; these women who had come after—what they had given him, looked suddenly pale and insignificant beside—that thing he had known with Dolly. To send her away——

"Well, you won't then?" Paula's voice broke in on him rather harshly. "You want to spend the rest of your life with that doll baby, with that silly laugh?"

"No," he cried, all memory fleeing, under the remembrance of that inane, everlasting laugh, "no! I will—I'll do what you say: I promise. Only—it must be something sensible, dearest (Michael knew Paula and her temperament well enough to add that proviso), it must be something that will be practicable, for all of us, you know. Don't——"

"Leave all that to me," she commanded; "I admit, it requires thinking, planning; but I'll solve it. And when I do,"—she looked at Michael steadily—"when the clue to the way out presents itself, we must not shirk. We must not despise the means, no matter what they may be, toward gaining our freedom; we must not shirk nor fear them. I have told you, Michael, what I intend saying to Guy—that I intend, firmly though courteously, to tell him I am *through*—and when it comes to me what you should do with regard to Dolly, then——"

"You are right," said Michael with more determination than she had ever heard him use, "when the clue comes, no matter what, we must seize it courageously. I hope for God's sake it comes soon, too!" he cried, determination falling into the arms of something even more vigorous.

"Only watch," said the goddess—of wisdom, "it will come. And I truly believe, Michael (though an after-thought, it was none the less beautifully altruistic), I truly believe that your action, whatever form it takes, will be the making of Dolly. It will cause her to see where her slothful ignorance and lack of understanding has led her.

"One thing I will say," she added generously,

"if it hadn't been for Dolly's chance remark about the stand Guy was taking with regard to you and me—the debased, sordid stand—I never should have seen things in their true light, as I did."

"Dolly's remark? Why, that's rather queer, isn't it, Paula? That Dolly should have been the one who started all—I mean to say——"

"There, never mind Dolly," interrupted the other woman pettishly. "Do let's forget her while we can, and go into the garden."

"But when Dolly comes back to-night," she added, slipping her arm through his as they went down the long passage, "be very calm with her, Michael. I know it's a temptation to lose one's temper with her—I do myself sometimes (about every ten minutes the last day or two, my dear Paula)—but just be perfectly calm and unapproachable. Then her accusations will fall absurdly and without point. She will see you are impervious to her pettiness. Goodness gracious!" as they came to the end of the passage, "there's that scent she burns—how peculiar!" Paula herself was surrounded with nothing less æsthetic than *trèfle incarnat*.

"I don't like it a bit," said Michael decidedly. "There's something sinister about it—Arab stuff, you know, and too big leaves of it are poison.

Come on, Paula—I'll remember about to-night."

He did. He met Dorofée with the most wonderful composure woman ever beheld—even out of Boston. Dorofée met him with a gentle detachment. She went directly upstairs to change for dinner, and all during that meal had little if anything to say. When she spoke to Paula, she was quite as usual, though a little quieter and more subdued; when she spoke to Michael, she hardly spoke at all, and twice the tears sprang up in her sweet childish eyes, and overflowed. It was very distressing. After dinner, Michael motioned to Paula to go on out into the garden; he approached Dorofée—kindly, but with dignity.

"Now then, Dolly, I wish you would tell me what all this means." Dorofée had left the table and was standing by the door into the court, her tiny handkerchief very limp in one hand. "Why you made a scene and behaved so childishly before my guest?" (Yes, Paula was now *his* guest.)

Dorofée turned to him the saddest little face in the world. "Michael, Michael!" she asked hopelessly, with a sort of moan between her words, "Michael, *where is your conscience?*"

"I don't know what you mean," returned Michael, with less dignity and more positiveness. "Do explain what you're talking about, Dolly!"

"I'm talking about the woman—the woman at Villa des Fruits," Dorofée this time sobbed outright. "Oh, Michael!"

"Now see here, Dolly, this is all very well, but you needn't go on, you know. If Hassan's been telling you any stories——"

"Hassan? You think I would *stoop* to listen to a servant's stories? Oh, Michael, this is too dreadful. Michael, I don't know you any more."

"You certainly don't," said Michael tartly. "Well, then, if not Hassan, who did tell you? How did you find out?"

Dorofée shook her screening curls into her pained young eyes. "The handkerchief," she moaned, her little voice strangled between agitated coughs, "the woman's handkerchief, Michael, on the window seat!"

"Damn!" said Michael furiously—he was doing considerable swearing, these days. To have got through safely on every side, including the side of a garrulous Arab servant, and then to have been given away by a handkerchief! Damn! he said again, to himself.

Aloud, "My dear Dolly, plenty of women have handkerchiefs. I dare say Hassan found that in the place somewhere and thought it was yours."

"I hope he did, indeed," breathed Dorofée

between sobs. "I hope, Michael, that no one knows of my shame, of your perfidy, but you and I—and this miserable woman, whoever she is."

"Whoever she is?" Michael bolted involuntarily. "Oh—oh, I——"—then the handkerchief had not been initialled, thank God!—"I wish you'd believe that you're mistaken, Dolly," he said, assurance returning in great comforting bounds, "I assure you——"

"Michael, assure me of nothing." His wife faced him fully, and with more dignity than he had ever seen her wear. "My eyes are opened now. I see that I forgave you once, only to forgive a thousand times. But that I refuse, Michael. I refuse to countenance or to pardon any more such lapses of honour and right as you have now twice been guilty of. And oh, Michael, what would *Paula* say? If I, just your simple, commonplace little wife, see your error, what do you think would be the horror of Paula—with her infinitely higher-minded ideas, her pure, sincere vision?"

"I—I don't know what Paula'd say," stammered Michael, avoiding those tragic, reproachful round eyes. "I—don't talk to her about it, Dolly."

"If this goes on any longer, I mean if it oc-

curs again, this sign of utter consciencelessness," said Dorofée emphatically, "I certainly shall talk to Paula. If I see it is necessary, I shall tell her about this woman at the Villa des Fruits, and about Amande——"

"Oh no! No, Dolly," interrupted Michael quickly. "Please not about Amande—she wouldn't understand. Paula——"

"Nor do I understand," said his wife severely, "and I may need the help of a woman of Paula's great experience. For I want to tell you, Michael (surely it was a new Dolly who gazed at him with such cold determination), I mean to go to the bottom of this: I mean to find out how far I've been deceived, and to assert my rightful place. I am your wife, Michael, and no one, no woman, shall replace me, or put me aside in your affection. Michael, you do love me?" With sudden complete change of manner she threw her arms up round his neck and clung to him desperately. "You're not tired of me, Michael, *really?*"

Michael looked at her. And slowly, while his face hardened almost to brutality, unclasped her arms and put her from him.

"If there is one thing I never could endure," he said coldly, "it is a jealous woman. You may do exactly what you please about your so-called

rights, Dolly. You will find they do you little good."

He left her standing there, and walked swiftly away in the direction of the garden. Dorofée in the darkness went and stood by the soft-laughing little fountain. "A jealous woman," she murmured to it with a low chuckle; "that was my trump card. I think, by its help, and the help of a little item I saw in to-day's paper, I can take the trick—very soon. To-morrow night at dinner we shall see; for the time is getting short. But that look on Michael's face just now—it was almost a *man's* look; an Eastern man's. It was almost virile, terrifying—ah, if he could have been that! If he could have frightened me, mastered me, ruled me! But—— Is that you, Simon *mon bijou*? Yes?—come here. You had an interesting day, no, Simon?" The pale eyes looked back at her, silently, impenetrably—the Spirit of Silence stood always a little distance off. "And I, too, had a very interesting day. Won't it be delicious, when I am out in space somewhere, and watch Michael asking Hassan about my visit to the villa! And that handkerchief—oh la! la!" The tiny figure by the fountain laughed noiselessly (as a normal-minded creature cannot laugh); then grew suddenly very quiet.

"I have paid my last visit to the Casbah, Simon," said the little voice strangely. "I shall never be with the Arabs again except (slowly) for a little moment, an hour perhaps, when I shall become truly an Arab woman. Barali said it: that night at the masque, when we talked, he said 'come—when the hour is that you cannot be that mere brain any longer—come, and I will teach you your real self; the self of an Eastern woman that is you.' I shall go, Simon. I shall go to him just once. This mere brain, as he said it would, wearies me. I shall taste—the other side of life! But that, though wonderful, will be very different. No, I have paid my last visit to the Casbah." And leaving the fountain, she went inside slowly—draggingly it seemed, almost. The Spirit of Silence followed inscrutably after.

V

AKMED—who had by the way remembered his instructions to be *very* nice to the ‘new lady’—was setting the table in the court, by a tall date palm. Besides being a chauffeur, he was a very impressive and irreproachable butler; particularly gorgeous to-night in a jacket of mauve and silver, enormous full blue trousers and a wide rose sash. The ‘new lady,’ from the gallery above, regarded him with approval. Like Michael, she adored ‘atmosphere’; and Akmed exuded atmosphere from every fold.

“Oh, are we going to dine outside?” Paula called to him in French. “How nice! It is a beautiful evening, isn’t it, Akmed?”

“Yes, my lady.” Akmed looked up with his dazzling smile from under the infantile moustache. “It is the night of the new moon, my lady, the little moon that brings happiness or misfortune. It is very well to dine outside.”

He went on arranging the silver, and Paula turned back to her room.—The little moon that brings happiness or misfortune—and in another

day, two more nights, Guy would return. She bit her lip sharply. She would never go back to Guy, never—oh, she had no doubt but what he would fight for her, but she would never go back to him. Anyone—even Guy—could see that she and Michael were made for each other, that they could not live without each other; and that therefore Guy must give her up, Dolly must give Michael up—and in some way be got rid of.

It was all quite clear. Yet Paula, as she dressed her red, red hair, felt uneasy. Perhaps because she knew Guy—knew his baser spirit, that is—his stubborn, complete virility. Perhaps because there had as yet appeared to her no ‘clue’ as to getting rid of Dolly; who after all, unfortunately, was in the holden eyes of man Michael’s wife. Paula, sheathing herself in a casing of sombre black, expressed her mood with unconscious exactness. As she descended to the dinner-table in the wide open court, she felt black.

Michael and Dorofée, already down, noticed (with their own consequent emotions) her gloom; and did not notice it. It was a dinner that Michael and Dorofée and Paula remembered.

“I have not seen you all day, dear Paula,” said Dorofée, as they sat down, “but then I took such

a long nap," she laughed a little apologetically. "I went to sleep and slept straight through luncheon, without waking at all."

"That wretched scent again, I suppose." Michael's (now characteristic) irritation spared Paula the trouble of answering. "Ashes of Incense! I'll hate that name to my dying day."

Dorofée broke into a low laugh—to Michael a horrible laugh—changing it at once to a slight cough.

"Well, what's the matter—what's so funny?" he demanded curtly.

His wife looked up, again with her usual angelic smile. She was rather white. "Why, nothing, Michael," she said soothingly, "only you were so vehement about it."

"I feel vehement about it," retorted Michael, crumbling his roll and drinking his soup with a jerky haste that spoke of nerves at tight rein. "I hate Arab stuff, any way, all of it."

"The scent gives very pleasant dreams," said Dorofée, sweetly ignoring his ill-humour. Since her outburst of the night before, she had been all clinging propitiation to Michael. She had twined her arms about him and kissed him till he wanted to shriek. "This afternoon it gave me a *very* nice dream—I quite forgot about that thing

I read in the newspaper before I went to sleep—that murder in Marseilles, you know.” She looked at Paula.

“A murder?” Paula appeared not greatly interested.

“Yes—didn’t you read? Some man murdered his wife—because she simply worried and nagged him crazy.” Dorofée’s shallow laugh rippled—she always laughed, reflected Paula, no matter how irrelevant to the subject laughing was. “The paper said they were going to hang him—I think that’s rather cruel, don’t you? if he really was driven crazy?”

“I certainly do,” said Michael, with so much emphasis that Dorofée shook her curls into her eyes. “The question of crime in any case is wholly problematical. Wholly.”

The fiat having gone forth, conversation on the topic might reasonably have ceased had not Dorofée added, “yes, and there is always the question of the higher law, isn’t there? The law a man feels inside himself, I mean? I suppose it was that, that really gave him the clue to the way out,” with another little laugh.

Paula and Michael started—individually; their eyes met. The clue! “The higher law, yes,” said Paula rather slowly, “that certainly comes first.”

"If I'd been that man," Dorofée leaned forward with an important little wag of the head, "and I felt 'it was right—that it was the only thing—to—er—dispose of my wife, I'd have done it in some inconspicuous way that the world would never have found out. Because," ingenuously she raised her eyes, "he knew the world's law was wrong, and his law, the higher law, was right—so why do it so that the world could punish him for what he knew to be right? That seems to me stupid—not clever—though perhaps I'm too simple to see straight." This time her laugh was light as a summer cloud. Michael gazed at her with a strange fascination; for the moment he had forgotten that *she* worried *him* crazy.

"I think it is stupid,"—Paula seemed to be rousing from her gloom to interest—"to be so slavishly bound and guided by a set of laws and conventions oneself had no hand in making, and believes not in the least."

"But the horrid part is, one *must* be guided by them unless one acts unknown to the people who do believe them. I mean to say, people are so nasty about suspecting things, aren't they?" laughed Dorofée. "In this case, look: they say, this man killed his wife because he hated her. Hang him. And the man's as good as hung, the

minute he's found out. How can those callous, coarse-grained judges and jury and things know *why* he killed her? She may have been just a necessary sacrifice to the universal good—in that case I think it was *noble* of him to kill her."

"Evidently it's made an impression on you any way, Dolly." Michael spoke rather constrainedly—for the first time in some minutes.

"Yes, it has," confessed Dorofée with innocent frankness; "it seems to me so cruelly unjust, his being hung. It seems so barbarous, for these days."

"If she—his wife—really was a sacrifice to the universal good, (somehow, in conversation with Dorofée, Paula got back the vocabulary of the Higher Plane, that abandoned her when she was alone with Michael) a *necessary* sacrifice," Paula said thoughtfully, her eyes on the soft incessant plashing fountain, "then the man is a martyr. For he not only did right, but a great right, to benefit many more than just himself. As Michael says, it's all problematical, in the worst cases—the worst-appearing cases; but in this case it seems almost positive that the man did right. No, certainly they ought not to hang him." Paula

turned to the entrée Akmed had placed before her.

"They'll never *see* that he did right," persisted Dorofée; "he should have chosen some way they wouldn't have found out—like lead poisoning or something. An overdose of morphine has killed people many times, and would be lots more agreeable, I should think (with a little laugh) than getting shot. No, that man did only part right, Paula dear. He should have remembered to cover up his good deed—because of those coarser-minded souls who could not understand it. That man is an unnecessary victim, a *tragic* victim to the world's misunderstanding, its brutality."

"But suppose he hadn't been found out"—Michael talking seriously to his 'simple little wife' was an exclamation point of self-forgetfulness—"wouldn't his conscience always have hurt him?"

Dorofée coughed violently. She had evidently choked on a crumb.

"Why, of course not, Michael," responded Paula, a little impatiently, "why should his conscience hurt him—such an absurd word, conscience, anyway!—when his own law, the higher law, would tell him that he had done exactly right?" Really, Michael was a little stupid this

evening: he kept looking fixedly at one thing after another, looking almost vacantly, and not eating at all. "Don't you see?" Paula, metaphorically, shook him.

"Ye-es," Michael drew a long breath, "yes, I see. I see what you mean, and you may be right. I believe you are right."

"Of course I'm right." Paula had no other notion but that she had stated and explained and proved the whole idea of the murderer's real innocence—nay, his *nobility*—and the reasons why he should have kept his actions secret. "And any one who believes as we do, in man's duty to himself—as a part of the great universal Being—before his duty to—er—any one temporarily related to him (suddenly Paula looked at Dorofée—and it was a full minute before she remembered to go on), cannot fail to see that under some circumstances," she added, her voice curiously deliberate, "murder becomes not murder."

"That is just what I tried to say," Dorofée looked up from her quail and truffles, delightedly, "only I wasn't clever enough. Dear Paula, you do state things so *beautifully*, so clearly and smoothly!"

Paula did not even look at her. Paula was absorbed with looking at Michael; who however

did not raise his eyes from glassy fixedness on his plate.

"And when one sees the way clear, as that man saw it," continued Paula in the distinct tones of a tutor, say further a tutor in religion, "one should not shirk."

"No, indeed," echoed Dorofée solemnly. "Do you think so, Michael?"

"I—I—no, I suppose not. No,—no, he shouldn't," said Michael with an effort.

"Oh, hasn't this been a *beautiful* conversation?" sighed Dorofée happily. "I don't know when I've enjoyed anything so much—been so uplifted, I mean. Dear Michael and Paula, I've really felt for the first time up on your level!—oh, just for the moment, you know (apologetically), just when we were all agreeing together about its being not murder at all, but a noble, noble action. And how funny"—with her incessant little laugh—"that all this wonderfully *helpful* talk should have arisen out of my dream from my scent!—my *Ashes of Incense*!"

"Oh—yes! It was that that started it, wasn't it?" Michael spoke as though he had to say something; as though after his sustained silence it was expected of him.

"Yes. I'll be murdering myself, too, if I don't

look out." (Michael thought if Dolly laughed that laugh again he would strangle its shallow ripple!) "To-day, do you know, I *very* nearly got those two packages mixed, and took one of the *large* leaves by mistake. It was dark in the room and I reached over from my bed, and *all* but took out of the wrong package. There's so little left now of the small leaves, the packets are quite the same size. I can tell you it frightened me! And when I told N'ala about it, she got quite white."

"Oh, you told N'ala!" Michael said it for no apparent reason.

As for Paula, she had stopped eating and was gazing steadily at the little moon—now high above them. Gloom had gone from Paula: a crimson spot burned in each cheek.

"Do—do be careful, Dolly," Michael added hastily, nervously, "I've asked you a hundred times to stop using that horrible scent."

Dorofée leaned over and patted him caressingly. "I'll have to stop soon," she said, "there's so little of it left—of the small pieces. But it isn't horrible scent, Michael, it's very, very sweet; and it gives enchanting dreams. Dreams that are real, you know, more real than life. I think,"—the baby face lost its sudden intensity and grew

absolutely vacant—"I should like to lie and sleep, from that scent, for ever. Ah, *te voilà*, Simon!" She sat up the next minute very gay—sparkling with childish amusement. "So it's you, you villain, who have been under my chair scratching! Come along then, I'll get your milk.—And I'll come into the garden for coffee in just a few minutes," she called back to the other two.

But after Simon's milk, she found some orders to give to N'ala, and then there was Akmed, standing smilingly child-like as herself, with whom to discuss the 'little moon' and its possibilities; and there was also a short absence upstairs, to write something very fast and ecstatically in the little blue book locked in her desk. So that when finally Dorofée did get out in the garden, fully an hour had gone by.

Entering the arbour, one could hear low voices, talking earnestly—was it excitedly as well? At any rate, with the frou-frou of Dorofée's frilly skirts, they stopped.

"You have finished coffee?" Dorofée asked, hunting a chair. "*Mon Dieu!* isn't it dark out here—the little moon with its misfortune or happiness doesn't last long, does it?" With no offer of assistance on Michael's part, she had found a

chair, and arranged her frills daintily within it. "And what have you two had your wise, clever heads together about?" playfully.

Dead silence. Then, "we were talking about you," said Michael, in the desperation of the moment telling the truth.

"About me?" came that eternal little laugh. "You two brilliant, clever things talking about silly little Dolly? But what on earth did you find to say about me?"

"We said how glad we were, how very happily surprised, to find you taking such a high view of something." Paula inserted an answer firmly, before Michael was given another chance to blunder. "How splendid it was of you to see these things at last in our light," added Paula modestly.

"How perfectly sweet of you!" The cloudy gold head was bent upon Dorofée's breast; humbly, it is to be supposed. "But dear Paula—I'm so stupid—*what* things? Do you mean the murder? Seeing the murder in your light—which is *of course* the true light," she agreed.

"I mean seeing man's duty as it lies," said Paula coldly.

"Yes, it does lie, doesn't it? That's what Mr. Templewaite said once, I remember," Dorofée

floundered vaguely, "something about how a man couldn't tell his duty really, because it fibbed against itself all the time. I suppose——"

"Man's duty as it *is*, Dolly," broke in Paula wearily; "do get the verb! And as for Guy and his flippant remarks," she stiffened in the darkness, "please do not let us discuss him."

"No, of course not," said Dorofée hastily, "because he comes back the day after to-morrow, and that's quite soon enough to think about him, isn't it, Paula dear? Oh, Michael, don't you hate to think of Paula's husband coming and carrying her off?" She turned to the silent shadow that was Michael. "Isn't it dreadful to think of giving her up? Dear Paula, I do wish you were staying here always—couldn't we prevail on Mr. Templewaite to——"

"Dolly, for God's sake stop chattering!" burst out Michael, as though something pent up inside him broke its leash. "Paula's staying here is all arranged; and—Mr. Templewaite has nothing to do with it," he concluded savagely.

"Oh!" Meekly Dorofée subsided. Under cover of the darkness, her rosebud mouth curved slightly.

Paula said nothing; and for another long moment there was complete silence. Then, "I've

just been talking to Akmed about Amande, Michael," Dorofée began again. "Amande," she explained to Paula, "was a maid we had—oh, I told you about her, about her sleeping in *la première's* niche, where you sleep now." Dorofée coughed a little.

Michael rose, with an exclamation, and began walking up and down the arbour.

"Well, you see, Amande——"

"I'm quite sure Paula can have no interest in Amande, Dolly," put in Michael swiftly, "a mere servant who——"

"Who pleased us for a time, dear Michael," reminded Dorofée just a shade reproachfully. "I am interested in Amande's future, even though in her past she did some things—she has probably regretted," ended Michael's wife, with the sweetest charity. "We sent her away, Paula, because——"

"Dolly, won't you please stop?" begged Michael, grinding his heel into the gravel. "Don't you see you are only boring Paula?"

"My dear Michael," said Paula graciously, "if it pleases Dolly to tell me the little story, I am quite willing to hear it. Why should you mind?"

"I was merely going to say that we had found Amande a place as waitress," Dorofée explained

a trifle plaintively, "and to tell Michael how Akmed said she was getting on."

"Well—well? How is she getting on?" jerkily. In his great relief, Michael sat down again. "Likes her new place, does she?" It was exactly six days since the thought of that place had made Michael writhe; now, he remembered vaguely, the girl had gone to some café or other—he forgot the name, ah! Café du Soleil.

"Akmed didn't say whether she liked it," returned Dorofée, looking at Michael through the night with a little, baby smile; "but she does like it, I suppose, since heaps of men go there just to see her."

"Ah!" Michael's memory jogged itself a bit at this, "yes, I dare say they would. Very pretty girl," he told Paula so casually that it was an explosion—of nonchalance.

"Yes, and *so* devoted to Michael—and me, both," Dorofée added warmly; "that, really, was why we sent her away. She—her devotion was almost *oppressive*, wasn't it, Michael?" Ah, if only it had not been so dark, and she could have seen the hate in Michael's face—the little rose-leaf person sighed profoundly. Then rose, with soft fluttering of ribbons. "I must go up now, you dear things; I've a little writing to do before

I go to bed. You'll forgive me for leaving you, Paula?" with a close, clinging embrace.

Paula murmured something—if she had not been a goddess and a dweller on the Higher Plane, one would have said it was "Stuff!"

"And oh, Paula!" having kissed Michael several dozen times, Dorofée at the end of the arbour called back. "Is the middle niche quite comfortable, Paula dearest? You're satisfied—you don't want to change? I ought to have asked before," abjectly, "but I'm such a stupid little hostess!"

"I'm quite comfortable, thanks," returned Paula briefly.

"That's *so* nice. Then good-night, you two—if I don't see you again." It seemed as though the shallow little voice lingered just a trifle on the last phrase.

"If I don't see you again"—in the dim faïenced passageway a low chuckle went back to Simon, who was following noiselessly—"are you there, *mon beau petit*? Come inside then, quick!" she pushed the great cat into her room, ahead of her. "Oh!" sinking down on to the floor, in a spasm of silent mirth. "Did you ever spend such an enchanting half-hour, Simon? Ever? I didn't. For all the time, remember, Simon, all the time

I was talking, first about the husband and giving Paula up, and then about Amande—oh, he *was* funny about Amande, he was so scared for fear Paula—Michael was trying to get *the idea* out of his head. The idea of the 'shalt do no murder' sin, Simon. Paula has planted it there, never fear! And he's trying to forget it. But all the time something inside keeps repeating, 'she's driving me crazy, she's driving me crazy, oh, how I hate, her, how I hate her, how I hate her!' And then comes *the idea*, slyly, suggestively, persistently. And he'd try to get it out of his head—oh, I know! I know every thought of Michael's before he thinks it, every syllable he says to himself before he says it—but he can't. The idea is there; rooted as firmly as all subtle, concealable things root themselves. And—Michael will not be able to resist. No, *mon petit choux*; Paula will keep at him, and as I told him twice, the scent is *almost gone*. Soon there will be only one packet left—if he does not hurry! But Paula will make him hurry," with a low rippling laugh; "I could not have had a better ally than Paula."

The wee handful of frills rose joyously, turned on the light, and proceeded to exchange her rose dimity for an elaborate lacey peignoir. Up from the garden came the low continuous murmur of

voices—so low they seemed almost a rumble; a rumble of thunder, still rather far distant. Dorofée heard the rumble with a delighted smile. The Spirit of Silence heard it; without the minutest sign of interest. Simon, the grey-blue Persian cat, curled into a ball of fluff beside the white desk, and appeared to sleep.

“But he doesn’t,” wrote Dorofée in the little blue book, “he only appears to; one of the things I like most about the Spirit of Silence. The thing (though they don’t know it) that makes Michael and Paula hate him most. Anyway, mother-in-law, I think now you are not going to wait long for your book. As you aren’t dead, you must be convalescing; it will make a nice book for your convalescence. Give me just two days more—till the night after the husband comes home—and you shall see! Provided I don’t meantime wreck everything, fault of this enormous sense of humour of mine. To-night at dinner, I very nearly did. When I laughed *my own* laugh and Michael heard it!—oh, but I was terrified: for a moment I thought I had spoiled all my work of years, with Michael. But it passed. He forgot. He was too taken up with the wretched scent—Ashes of Incense, whose name he will hate to his dying day—exotic!—to give my laugh much thought after

all. Michael is concerned with me now only as an obstacle, and—as Paula has certainly told him—strong men were made to push aside obstacles. To remove them from interfering with the universal happiness—from standing in the true light, that is, ‘our light.’ Oh la! la! what words we have mouthed this night. But, Michael—it is rather an odd incident—is becoming almost attractive to me in this new mood. Once to-night, when his face was very dark and furious, he reminded me of Barali. If he did not fancy himself clever, this good-looking Michael (and he *is* good-looking, *mais un dieu!*), one might—but it is too late for anything like that, now. And how unconscious Michael was when he said, “Oh, then you told N’ala!” But of course I told N’ala; of course I have arranged it so that the servants shall know I was—ah—removed—by my own mistake, *never* by any one’s else, my dear Michael. Mother-in-law, even you who always said I would ruin Michael, must confess that I have arranged every detail for him, to smooth his way and make it clear. He shall have committed the three deadly sins in the most pleasantly unobtrusive manner; and it is only when this little blue book comes to light, that his conscience will return to persecute him for it. ‘Conscience’ and ‘being

found out': synonyms, eh mother-in-law? I shall give the book to Akmed, *on the night*, to send by registered post. *Mon Dieu*, how I should writhe if it were lost! Just that dangerous break to-night, that laugh, made me see how dear my triumph is to me; even in prospect. Absent-mindedness, curiosity, jealousy, vapid inanity, I have run the gamut of wife's exasperations with Michael. And now, torment. Yes, during the next two days I must not let him alone for an instant; he is even now at the point where he wants to beat me to take his irritation out on me some way—the laugh has done that. I must be with him to torture him, to nag, and nag always in the most maddening way—the way the cat, at the moment of excruciation, relents once more, and lets the mouse have just another run. *Alors!* Michael and Paula having come upstairs, I shall just see what they are doing!"

But she did not go quite yet. She waited, turning out her light and sitting curled up in a ball by Simon, until her room had rested in darkness for an entire hour. Then, gently, she set Simon on the balcony outside—a favourite exit of his, since there was a tree just next, by which he could descend into the garden.

She put Simon outside, and then closing the

persiennes after him, came back through the room, and so went into the open gallery. The little moon had long since set: the night in its square flooding of the court, was very black. Very black and very still. The patterns in the faïenced tiles, so mellow-indistinct by day, stood out fantastic spider things by night, creeping and crawling, interlaced over the walls about. The wee person in lace and silk ruffles looked at them interestedly. They crept as quiet as herself down the dark passageway.

Outside the Sultan's door she stopped, and knocked. There was a sudden *thud* inside, as of something falling—a book perhaps. "Michael," called the tiny person softly. "Michael, let me in. It's I—it's Dolly."

A strange *swishing* noise from inside, and then the door opened; upon Michael, white as death in the glare of his Welsbach reading-lamp. "What do you want?" he asked thickly.

"Why, Michael *dearest*, how dreadful you look! Is anything wrong?" Dorofée and the blue silk peignoir were now well inside the room. "I saw your light, so I came to ask if you had Simon—I can't find him anywhere," plaintively, "and you know I'm always so frightened lest the Arabs will steal him. Is he here?" As she spoke

she was looking; under chairs, behind book-cases, in dim corners; looking, looking, her cloud of shining pale gold hair an angelic aureole about her.

"No, he isn't here—certainly he's not here. Don't you know I'd have put him out if he'd come—I can't stand the beast!" Michael had moved out of the light. He stood in front of his dressing-room door, his fingers twitching—with impatience?

"No—no, I know you can't," soothed the little silk and lace person sweetly, "but just let me look—you won't mind that, Michael dear. For (she was stooping to rummage under a divan) he might just possibly have slipped in, don't you know, while you and Paula were working. You did work to-night, for a little? No," without waiting for an answer, she straightened up, "he's not under there, but I found this handkerchief—why, Michael," in accents of unutterable reproach, "it's another of those handkerchiefs like the one I found at the villa, double-hemstitched all round, only this one has an initial——"

"Give that to me"—Michael almost tore it from her—"and do for God's sake go back to bed. You're enough to drive a man insane!"

"That is not a nice way for you to speak, Mi-

chael." Dorofée regarded him with a hurt dignity,—also—could it be?—with a peculiar faint interest. He was glaring at her. His fingers on her arm had left red marks. The childish nostrils dilated ever so little. Still she went on: "and I am surprised to find you still so completely callous about keeping that other woman's things about you, while Paula——"

"Oh, leave Paula out of it," urged Michael violently, "*are* you going back to bed, Dolly?"

"Why, yes—why? Because it's one o'clock do you mean? Yes, I'm going, only first"—she slipped behind him and turned the knob of the door into the dressing-room—"I'll just look in here for Simon."

"No, you won't." Michael laid an iron hand on her arm (Dorofée trembled slightly, looking down at his hand with an instant's strange concentration) but dropped it as he met the two all-innocent, puzzled eyes. "I mean to say, there's no use in your looking there. The door into my room's been shut all day."

"Yes, but Simon might have come in from the gallery door, Michael. I'll just look." And—Michael's face growing more and more livid—she turned the knob and went into the dressing-room. It was quite empty.

Michael drew a breath so sharp that it whistled. "You see?" he said quickly. "Nothing in here."

"Nothing in here," Dorofée echoed cheerfully, though searching at the same time. "Now just one peep into your room——"

"No!" said Michael peremptorily. "No, Dolly!" Ah, God! to be at the mercy of a doll baby, a bundle of fripperies! Paula was right! He would do anything, yes even *that*, to be rid of her. "The door is locked." Michael lied patently.

"Locked? But why?" Dorofée's dimpled hand was on the door. She stood there watching Michael, smiling at him. Yes, he interested her. He looked *man*, every bit of him. By a curious miracle she did not turn the knob. This time she only laughed a little and came away.

Michael wanted to choke that laugh, for ever.

"*Eh bien*, it seems you're right, doesn't it?" Dorofée reached up and kissed him—rather differently, though he was too overwrought to notice, from her usual butterfly caresses. "Nothing here, and I'll go back to bed. Good-night, Michael dearest. Oh!"—as she went out into the passage—"I'll just stop at Paula's room and ask her if she's seen Simon. He often goes into the

Favourites' room, he likes it. I'll just ask Paula."

"Dolly!" as she started toward Paula's door, "I forbid you to go into that room," thundered Michael. "I forbid you, at this hour of the night, to disturb Paula," he added more calmly. "All this fuss over that wretched cat!"

"I was only going to see if he was there," pouted Dorofée gathering up her trailing silk ruffles. "But very well, Michael," resignedly, "I will not disturb Paula. As you say, in the middle of the night she might not like to be disturbed. *Dormez bien*, Michael." And down the black spider-circled vista, the tiny blue and gold person flutteringly disappeared.

"At the moment of excruciation, letting him out for one more run," floated a playful cat-thought, back along the corridor. "But—when he thundered like that, I could almost have—no, it is too late for all that. I am a brain now, I'm *a plan*. Good-night, Michael."

The spidery passages grew even darker. Night and the shapes of night possessed the silent house with absolute dominion. There was an instant when a door opened; when another door opened and closed—not quite altogether. Then there was just night again. It wrapped and swathed and folded things about till Allah himself must

have gone blindfold through its black. And in the midst of it, a woman lying asleep in the middle niche of the Favourites' room, opened her eyes suddenly, to meet the eyes of—the Spirit of Silence. Fixed upon her through the black, they were pale, pale; impenetrable and at the same time all-knowing. She shuddered, trying to escape them. But though the rest of the world's eyes were shut to her, the eyes of the Spirit of Silence she could not escape.

VI

"AN unexpected impetus to things has come," wrote Dorofée, sitting at her desk by the window, "in the shape of the premature arrival of the husband. After a breakfast that for sheer moroseness was a triumph (Paula looked ghastly, and Michael spoke not one word), we were sitting in the garden over the mail when Akmed announced 'Monsieur Templewaite.' Even I jumped. Paula looked as though she was going to faint; and Michael—courageously—gathered up his letters and bolted into the house. I wish he had met Guy Templewaite on the way, but he didn't (I know, from what's going on now).

" 'Will you have him out here?' I asked Paula, as Akmed waited.

" 'I—yes,' she said, and some of her colour seemed to come down again from under the red hair. 'You're going in, Dolly?'

" 'I will stay if you want me to,' I answered agreeably (I didn't want to stay, mother-in-law; I'd already finished with Mr. Templewaite).

'What do you suppose brought him back so early?'

" 'I don't know,' sighed Paula, more helplessly and less temperamentally than I have ever heard her. 'I don't know—I suppose the boat left Gibraltar a day sooner than he expected. No, you needn't stay, Dolly—ask monsieur please to come out here,' she turned to Akmed.

"Akmed bowed his magnificent bow; disappeared. I, too, departed. And what went on between Paula and Guy Templewaite I don't know. I was with Michael, teasing him. But when Paula, now very red instead of white, and with quite a majestic defiance in her eye, came up and told Michael that Guy wished to speak with him, I left them and stole away in here. It is just over the arbour, my room, you know, and I wouldn't miss this scene between Michael and the husband for many dreams. It is because Michael hoped to miss it, that it will be so delicious. —Wait a minute, mother-in-law—Michael has just gone down. I'll listen and tell you what they say. I can see very well from here, too."

* * * * *

"How do you do, Mr. Templewaite?" Very formally Michael stood before Paula's husband.

"Sit down, Sargent"—neither of them offered

to shake hands—"I want to talk to you. Paula tells me (also sitting down himself) you have asked her to live with you." Paula's husband's voice was as hard as the cold white iron chair on which he sat.

"I have told Paula I shall be delighted if she will stay on here in my house as long as she pleases—er—indefinitely, in fact." Michael always *was* sensitive to terms.

"Exactly. As I say, you have asked her to live with you, here in your house. And it seems she has consented, that (Guy Templewaite's strong teeth snapped together) she is more than willing to leave me and accept your offer. May I ask, Sargent, if your wife knows of this arrangement about to be concluded?"

"My wife?" Michael laughed nervously. "What, Dolly? Why, yes. Dolly knows, of course, that I've invited Paula to stay on here—Dolly herself has urged her to, many times. She——"

"Does your wife know for just how long you have invited Paula to stay on?" pursued Templewaite inexorably. "Does she know the exact capacity in which Paula is to stay on?"

"Why, really, Templewaite, the exact capacity——? Really I don't quite understand you."

"Nor do I understand you," said Guy Templewaite, rising and towering over him. "You come into my house, the house of my trust, and steal my wife while I'm away! steal her and propose to keep her, always. Yet you haven't the courage to stand up and say that's what you propose. You miserable whelp! You're about as brave as your act proves you to be."

"Now look here, I won't stand this, you know. I won't allow you to talk to me this way. If Paula——"

"You'll allow me to talk to you any way I choose," returned Templewaite, sitting down again very calmly, "and you'll remember that for the present, I am Paula's husband."

"In the eyes of the law," added Michael—in-
evitably.

"Yes. And they're apt to be more accurate than the eyes of heaven," retorted the other with a grim smile. "These marriages before God are on and off so disconnectedly one can't expect the Almighty to keep strict count of them. What I started to say," as Michael sat back horrified at the profanity of the coarser mind, "was that I'm ready to give up being Paula's husband, if you're ready to marry her before man as well as before God. He only knows the life you'll lead her,"

—Guy Templewaite's hawk features grew rigid with contempt, with a suffering too that was more than the contempt;—"but on that condition I'll give her up. Otherwise I'll fight you to the death—and beat you," he added between his teeth.

"But—how can I marry Paula?" asked Michael, all bewildered, "when I'm married already?—to Dolly?" Over the name his voice stretched tight, as though strained to hide a colossal emotion.

"It complicates things, I admit," said Templewaite ironically. "But if your wife is still in the beautifully exalted frame of mind about you and Paula, that she was last week, I should think you would have little trouble, after all. I should think she would be only too glad to abdicate—as I, of so much baser, coarser viewpoint am ready to abdicate—for the sake of two superior beings, who are convinced they were made for each other."

"No, she won't," contradicted Michael doggedly. "She's jealous. She said the other day that she'd never give up her rights—never."

"Oh!" The brown-faced playwright opened his hawk-eyes wider. "So she's jealous at last, eh? In spite of what she said——"

"She's not jealous of Paula," interrupted Michael impatiently, "it was—something else."

"Oh!" said Guy Templewaite again—shortly. "So there have been others? I supposed so, but I was too cowardly to ask. I hoped you might feel something genuine for Paula; but if she's only one of a succession——"

"I say, Templewaite, you—you're insulting me, you know. I can't have it," Michael mustered considerable dignity. "Certainly there's been no——no succession, as you call it. Every man has his temptations, hasn't he, and his failures? Well, I've had mine. That's all there was about it."

Templewaite leaned forward—perhaps it was that unusual note of manliness in Michael's voice that made his own a little softer. "Then isn't Paula just one of those too, Sargent?" he asked almost gently. "Isn't Paula just a temptation—a beautiful woman whose ideas happen to coincide with yours, but whom, if she were taken away, you would soon forget—to return to your wife, to 'Dolly?' "

Perhaps he might have scored had he not added that name. "Dolly!" Michael almost shouted. Plainly his endurance of Dolly was at an end. "You think I'd return to Dolly, do you? that

inane bundle of curls and ruffles and giggle?—after Paula! Dolly be hanged!” and there was a menace, a snarl almost, behind his torrent of irritation. “What has Dolly ever been but a drag on me? What has she ever done that I should consider her? Silly, brainless little doll! Put a real woman beside her—a woman of magnetism and beauty and intelligence, and God! what’s *Dolly*? Do you think I want to spend my life with a puppet—*do* you?” He turned furiously on Guy. “Do you imagine for an instant that I’m going to give up the woman I love for the sake of a namby-pamby baby who ought to be wheeled round in a pram with her dolls? Because”—his voice grew suddenly, peculiarly quiet—“I’m not.”

“So”—Guy Templewaite sat back rather wearily—“that’s the state of things, is it? And you do love Paula, and you intend to have her?”

“Yes,” returned Michael sullenly.

“To the exclusion—the sacrifice of everything? Even your wife?”

“Yes,” more sullenly.

“I see. Then—let me put another side of the case to you.” Templewaite was sitting bolt upright. His nails dug into his hands. “Let me put it selfishly, from my own side: I’ve lived with

Paula for five years. I married her when she just a girl, a stenographer in a New York business office, and I just an ill-paid reporter, starting out. For the first year we went through all the fire and water of grinding poverty and the worst of bad luck. Then my play was accepted, and all at once we were well off; and found ourselves therefore with a host of friends (he spoke quite simply, without any touch of cynicism). They were the kind you would have liked for friends, too—they knew all about the Higher Law and Individual Liberty and that—and they pleased Paula at first, as novelty pleases a child. She's known just grinding office people before—drudges; and she took up with the new set like wild-fire. She began to have no time for me; and I began to work harder. That's where we were, when we decided to come out here. I was glad to come—delighted—because I was sure it would bring Paula and me together again, to the old closeness and congeniality. All winter I've kept hoping that, Sargent, and then she met you."

"Well?" Michael's eyes were on his boots. He sounded rather uncomfortable.

"Well, I saw at once the danger—dash it, man! Paula's only a child yet—oh, she may be twenty-seven and all that, but in experience, in knowl-

edge—why she's just a baby! I saw she was attracted to you, you belonged to the kind she'd grown used to imitating, and I tried to shield her. I did every blessed thing I could to keep her and you from the wretched slough you've fallen into this last week—all these last weeks—and I'll do every blessed thing to help you out, if you'll only let me! Sargent, if I was insulting to you just now, I ask your pardon—you must put it to the tremendous way I feel all this. I—I don't believe you're a cad, really; I think you're only weak and, like Paula, wholly unschooled in a certain line of experience. I've been all through that experience myself, gone to the bottom and drunk the dregs of it; and, as result, I think I know when I love a woman. I love just one, and no matter what she did or where she went, I'd still love her, and give up everything on God's earth for her. Sargent, are you going to take her away from me? You *aren't*, Sargent? No, you can't do that"—Guy Templewaite's voice was shaking as he watched every flicker of that handsome, high-boned face, a sensitive, appreciative face, with it all—"and here's the test: would *you* give up everything on God's earth for her? Even that duty to yourself that is so dear to you?"

It was a moment that hung quivering; like the

warm, palpitating heart just torn out of some creature brought to earth.

Then, "I love Paula," said Michael stubbornly, "and she loves me. It's a question of two people's happiness against one."

Templewaite drew a long breath. His mouth looked as though some one had struck it—so close compressed were the lips. But he tried once more, patiently. "If I thought it was for Paula's happiness," he said quietly, "do you think I'd stand in the way, Sargent? Not one minute. When I said I'd give up everything for her, I included herself. I'd give her up without a word—though I don't say it wouldn't nearly end me—if I thought her real happiness, her permanent happiness lay with you. But I don't. Paula is going to change in a little while: she's been going along, having these exalted affairs one after another, just like a school-girl gorges candy, but she's going to graduate. She's going to get sick of the candy; and then"—the brown alert face lit up till it was beautiful—"she'll come back to the simpler diet of her very young girlhood. Believe me, Sargent, I know. And when that time comes—wouldn't it hurt you, hurt you far worse than giving her up now, to know that you stood in her way?"

"I shouldn't stand in her way," objected Michael—a little abstractedly for being still taken up with the revelation that Paula too had had a succession—one after the other. "Paula would be free to leave me whenever she chose," added this magnanimous example.

"Ah, yes, perhaps." Guy Templewaite spoke slowly, difficultly, now. "But she would leave, a very different woman from the one that came to you. Great Heavens, man! don't you see? You *must* see. Paula's affairs—all her little foolishnesses—up to this time have been innocent, harmless. They've been just flirtations. Well—what she'd leave when she left you would be scarcely a flirtation."

Michael looked up with a start. Could it be possible—after all this talk—did it mean that Guy did not *know*? "You mean that up to the present Paula's—Paula's being here and all—all her relation with me still appear innocent to the world, as well as to ourselves?" asked Michael very deliberately. "That you think, suppose I did give her up now, there'd be no talk?"

"Why, of course not." Guy shook his shoulders impatiently. "If that's all that's bothering you—— Paula came here to stay a week with you and Mrs. Sargent, while I was away. I come

back, and she comes home. What's there in that?"

"But—but when you said that I'd stolen Paula ——" faltered Michael.

"And so you did, in my eyes," said Paula's husband, once more grimly. "You stole her mind and made it yours, and you persuaded her to tell me what she did this morning—that she was ready to leave me and give herself to you. But—my God!" he sprang up swiftly, "you don't suppose I'd sit here with my hands off you, if I thought there'd been anything more, do you?"

"No—no," said Michael hurriedly. "No, of course not. And of course I know you didn't mean *literally* stealing, when you spoke before. I—I think too that so far everything's been quite innocent."

"But not harmless," put in Guy, his mouth still stern as he took his seat again. "You and Paula have been living in an atmosphere as dangerous as an explosive. *You're* doing all you can to make the explosive go off—and disfigure Paula. Sargent, please, just as man to man, don't you see how the sort of thing you want would disfigure a woman? Won't you be unselfish, won't you love Paula enough to give her up?"

Again the moment hung suspended. Only as

Michael was hesitating, somewhere from above—within the house—a shallow little laugh floated out to them.

“And go back to Dolly?” Michael cried, his face grown crimson with passion, “no—no—no! I won’t. Paula’s mine, and I’ll keep her. I’ll never give her up.” (And standing there like that, defiant, he was as much *man* as the husband himself.)

“Then you’ll keep her as your wife,” retorted Templewaite once more all iron. “It just happens, my good friend, that there is a law, and that it obliges Paula to live with me unless she can establish some excellent reason for not doing so; which in this country of French rule, I think she would have some difficulty in accomplishing. No,” —Guy Templewaite rose, taking up his hat and stick—“if Paula refuses to save herself, and you refuse to help save her—from the ghastliness of what her future would be bound to be—that law shall save her. Paula, Mr. Sargent, will return to me to-day.”

“I think not,” said Paula coming through the arbour suspiciously à propos. “I heard your last words, Guy, and I want to tell you you are mistaken. I shall not return to you to-day, or ever.”

“Paula, I am sorry I have come to this last

expedient, but I can make you return to me, and I shall." Templewaite's bronze face was grey now.

"No," Paula continued, with the calm of high tension (the three stood there triangularly, facing each other), "no you won't. Not when you hear—that—I have—already belonged to Michael. You are too late to what you call 'save' me."

The stick in Guy Templewaite's hands splintered. "I'm sorry," he said, letting it fall with a queer discordant laugh, "I should like to use that stick." Involuntarily Michael moved a step back. "Oh, you needn't be afraid," Guy laughed again harshly, "I'm not going into any heroics after all. I have nothing," looking at Michael with eyes that made the higher soul cringe, "absolutely nothing adequate to say or to do to you: one can't talk to a thief in terms that he would understand. I have only to say to you," he turned to Paula, "that you are entirely right: not if you begged on your bended knees, could you return to me. I only urge that you will not try to contradict my statement, when I let it be known that you no longer bear my name. Good-bye." Another minute and he was gone; only the splintered stick lay there between Paula and Michael.

Paula sank into a chair and covered her face

with her hands. "Oh, his eyes—his eyes, Michael, weren't they horrible! And that laugh—Michael! he's going to disgrace me—I shall have no name, as he says, Michael. I shan't be married, or anything—oh, oh what *shall* I do?" The individual life and the higher plane and all the other tenets of the faith had dissolved all at once into just woman's language of panic: tears. "I shall be nobody, Michael," sobbed Paula, "I shall be a woman without a name!"

"There, there, Paula, don't cry—for God's sake don't cry. Michael sat down beside her and patted her shoulders with a hand that was trembling. In Boston he had never been placed in a position like this. It demanded action, no more just drifting along with whatever happened. "I'd know what to do in a minute, Paula," said Michael vehemently, "if only there weren't—*Dolly*."

"Ah, yes," Paula stopped crying and sat up straight. "Dolly! Michael"—she rose and faced him with a certain breathlessness—"is it to be Dolly or me? You know the way out of this—one of us must be sacrificed. Is it to be Dolly or me?"

For yet another time that morning the whole garden seemed to stop breathing, while an answer hung suspended. And even at the end of the

all-pregnant moment, there was still no audible answer. Only Michael and Paula exchanged a long, understanding look. "Let us go inside," suggested Paula softly, "to the study where we can talk."

* * * *

"And so that's where they are," concluded Dorofée, beside the fussy little French desk, "and haven't I put it all down nicely, mother-in-law? Just like a story out of a book, so that you could have the 'big scene' in all its drama—though of course it has taken much longer to write it all out, than it took just to talk it. And it was dramatic, wasn't it? Wonderful! when Michael hesitated, wavered, and then just a silly little laugh decided him! Delicious! And when he talked about spending his life with a puppet—*he*, oh, the satire of that was simply too good. I must say, though, there is something in Michael when he is furious, when he stands up and storms, that—well, that I've never known was in him. Something that rather interests me, if I weren't already absorb- edly interested in my murder scheme. There are moments when, if the scheme hadn't worked so beautifully, I might have got side-tracked on this new phase of Michael. I didn't count on that when I began. Oh, but I heard the husband say

the very words I wanted: steal and thief. He said them quite distinctly; so I am satisfied. Everything is complete now, and beautifully complete. Michael and Paula are even at this moment arranging the last details of Michael's third and deadliest sin—"You know the way out of this—one of us must be sacrificed. Is it to be Dolly or me?" How exquisitely they have all worked with me; real, obedient puppets to my wonderful idea. I suppose if I had a conscience, I should feel sorry for the husband—certainly he is the only one I have ever seen who seemed to be what they call sincere, in his conscience—but, *Dieu merci*, I am without one of those hindering bogies! I can work and carry out my beautiful, strange dreams without being interrupted all the time by Right and Wrong and Duty. And I am quite sure that it is just this—having no conscience—that has kept me all my life from suffering the one thing I am afraid of, that would cause me pain: *being laughed at*. No, no one has ever laughed at 'Dolly'; nor will they." Looking up musingly for a moment, Dorofée caught the narrow, half-shut scrutiny of the Spirit of Silence, levelled upon her. And Simon, the Persian cat, ran his tongue along his whiskers, as though—— The tiny hands snatched at him, furiously; the small face convulsed. "You

dare—you—you!" she stammered. "You *dare* to laugh at me, Simon—ah, *mon Dieu!* But no"—recovering herself quickly—"it was only a fancy, was it not, my little one? Only a fancy, and"—she wrote rapidly again—"by to-morrow night, I think—I myself shall be out in space somewhere, laughing for ever! I am going now to see Akmed about posting the book—I shall tell him he will find it, tied and sealed, on the salon table to-morrow evening; and then to become—ah, but that is my one secret from you; this thrilling thing I am, just for an hour, an Arab's hour, to become. Oh yes! mother-in-law, and I am sending you Amande's ring, too. I think it will be a nice keepsake for you, when Michael is—well, wherever he is after this little blue book comes to light. You see, here I am on the last page, so I can write just a line or two more to-night—to give you the very last bulletin concerning Dolly!"

The tiny fingers locked the desk and the little beruffled person turned slowly round, to gaze for a moment strangely at the coquettish blue and white room. In the bright light of noonday, the rosebuds on the rugs had looked never so pink; the ribbons tying up the frilly chairs and cushions, and strung along the white lace covered bed, never so blue. It was at the bed Dorofée looked

longest—the bed, patently, of a gay French doll. “I wonder—if when we first came here, if when we were first married, I had made this room *me*, not Dolly but *me*—would Michael have developed from simply a clever person into a—into what I worship—above all the schemes I have ever amused myself with? If I had been that odd thing they call sincere, if I had shown him my own self that the Arabs know, would he have loved me? As (she drew a deep breath) I am going to be loved just for an hour? But no!”—her eyes always on the frilly white bed—“no, he could not. One more dream in it,” she said curiously, to Simon, “and then—oh, a very long dream, to wake up laughing!” With the words a low laugh rippled at herself. “Why, I’m growing serious, actually! for the first time in my life! And just—as I am bound for something most worth while. Come, *mon petit*, we will go and find Akmed.” As she passed a little table, “ah, the scent!” picking up two minute packets, and peering into them, “two more small leaves only. Yes—Michael must hurry. It must be to-morrow that I—ah—get the packets mixed. ‘Ashes are grey, white-grey and very soft. Incense is sweet. It burns.’ And ‘in Algiers they use incense ashes for separating and testing the most precious met-

als'—even jokes, eh, Akmed?" Another low laugh filled the room (more and more the laugh of a person in strange delirium, where mad things become the only sanity, dreams the only actuality). The pale long eyes had a staring look; in them burned the light of a brain on fire with the exotic. "Jokes—and people. The two are one and the same. Ashes of Incense—oh la! la! Come, Simon."

Down the long passageway and into the court—with a slight backward smile at the closed door of the Sultan's room—she went; and always the Spirit of Silence followed noiselessly after. Noon in its blinding heat poured down into the old tiled court, making it now a glowing mass of gorgeous particolour; not a leaf of the date-palms quivered, not a fan of the cactus stirred. Motion and air and the essence of life itself had been gathered up and hoarded into just heat. The glare of it fell full on Dorofée's fluffy gold head; she caught up a hat out of the salon—a hat covered with forget-me-nots and dangling rose-silk ribbons, and went out—out the great front gates and into the garish white-lit street. Simon she had left with Akmed, who only looked up and smiled for a moment, from the mauve burnous he was mending in the porter's lodge. It oc-

curred to Dorofée that a French servant would have murmured something about luncheon time. She sighed, approvingly: she liked Arabs.

Out into the street and through the town she went, across the crowded Place du Gouvernement and past the gaudy, shop-hung arcades of the Rue Bab-Azoun; up the dusty hill into the new French quarter, with its clanging trams and black-smocked children playing under the eucalyptus trees. On and on went the tiny rose-beribboned person, her small face very white instead of flushed, under the scourging heat. Once she stopped to eat some sugary iced cakes at a sticky-smelling boulangerie; and again to glance with a small smile at a staring yellow sign that caught her eye: Café du Soleil. But always she trudged on again; until at last she came to Mustapha Supérieure—the *quartier de luxe* of Algiers, into the boundaries of the dwellings of the rich. The *Prince George Hotel* was here—Dorofée observed it uninterestedly out of her half-shut pale grey eyes—and the villas of her friends; those kindly creatures who were fond of telling what they did for ‘little Dolly Sargent.’ And up at the top of the hill, set back from the other houses and screened by great walls of shrubs, rose a villa larger than any, and more

magnificent. Dorofée, climbing the hill, could just see its flat white dome above the trees.

She came up to its gates and pulled the bell-rope gently. An old Arab porter appeared. "Is Barali Effendi at home?" she asked in Arabic.

"Most gracious lady, I will see if he is at home. If the light of Allah would graciously wait one instant in the lodge——"

Dorofée went in. The Arab disappeared.

In a few moments, down the drive bordered with flaring geraniums and lilies, came a man so tall, he seemed of the giants themselves. He was in European clothes—fastidiously correct—but wore the fez. When he saw Dorofée, "A-ah! it is you," drawing in his breath slowly. "I thought so, since Mohammed said 'the smallest in the world.' Well"—he stood like a giant statue before her in the little lodge—"so you have come?"

"Yes," Dorofée also spoke slowly, "I have come. I came on foot, so nobody noticed me. You said, that one night I saw you—that when I should weary of the mask—that when I should want to—become truly an Arab woman, I should come. So I am here. But it is only for a short time—a few hours. To-night I must be back; I have an important engagement."

"I am sorry," said Barali, bowing his head;

"but that you have come is good. And you are tired"—he raised his voice and called to the porter coming towards them down the drive—"Mohammed, bring a chair for madame, and summon the lady Phaia into the lower court. I wish to speak to her."

So, five minutes later, a low, luxurious swinging chair, borne on the shoulders of two Arabs black as night, carried Dorofée into the house, the Arab house, of Barali Effendi. She leaned back among her wealth of cushions drowsily—yes, she was very tired—a tiny, dreamy creature, a rose-leaf thing, lost in a cloud of gold hair. While beside her walked the giant man, arrestingly straight, fiercely yet beautifully dark; his proud head bent in absorbed concentration on the wee fair one beside him. Her pale half-opened eyes met his. They passed into the court.

A woman, veiled, but with enormous swaying hips (certainly not a servant, nor yet a lady of the harem; she would not have condescended. Besides, Barali was known among Europeans for having no harem), received them with a few low, welcoming words.

"You will see that this lady has refreshment, Phaia," said Barali, himself lifting Dorofée from her chair; "and other garments—*our* garments.

And when she is rested, send to me in the Eastern court: I shall be there."

"I obey my master," said the woman, in a curious half-chanting voice.

And Dorofée went with her.

If there was no harem in Barali's house, at least there were women's quarters; for two negresses came from an inner room to assist Phaia in obeying the master's commands. Dorofée watched them, interestedly, out of her pale long eyes; as swiftly they rifled chests of beautiful stuffs, pulled cob-webby veils from inner hiding-places, unlocked clinking anklets and a wonderful chain of uncut emeralds from an old iron box lying carelessly in a corner—she meanwhile eating cake and every variety of sticky sweetmeat. The negresses chattered and picked at each new article, like excited monkeys; but the woman Phaia remained singularly silent. Only when they had dressed Dorofée, and anointed her with some strange, cloyant Arab scent; when they had carefully arranged the haïck beneath the pale grey eyes and slipped on the heavy silver anklets, did Phaia finally speak.

"The little rose likes the Arab dress?" she said gently.

"Yes." Dorofée's eyes above the veil regarded

her. "And thou, who art good as the Prophet's own mother, dost thou like me in it? Am I—truly an Arab woman?"

The woman Phaia gazed away from her, to the blank gilded wall of the room where she lived. "No one is an Arab woman," she said finally, in her monotonous chanting voice, "not even one of us, until she has had for master an Arab man. And then—go, little delight." Abruptly she gave Dorofée over to the negress who stood waiting to conduct her. "Go."

And Dorofée, with a backward side-long glance at her, went. She was taken to Barali, who half knelt, half reclined, among the cushions of his divan, smoking; the long room where he was, hazy with dim, gorgeous rugs and silver and gold broderies. Barbaric copper and bronze lamps hung pendant from the mother-of-pearl-incrusted walls; and beside the door, there were only two slim slits in the dark wood, to let in light. The man on his divan was robed in the exotic splendour of a sheik of sheiks—crimson and dull argent stuffs, amber and the crude glory of unpolished jewels,—round his neck a Hand of Fatima wrought in pale jade; on the first finger of his right hand a great glowing ruby, winking its blood-red eye throughout the dusky room. The

tiny, veiled creature from the doorway caught its gleam, stopped, arrested: and this was in a villa, on Mustapha Supérieure, in the most frivolous Occidental quarter of a French city!

"It must make you laugh," said the tiny creature, coming forward; "to live apparently more European than them all, while really—behind the mask of this one door, you are—something quite different."

"My little white moon, I never laugh—except at myself. And as for what I am—who but Allah can say? A man who knows himself, surely would be wiser than the All-Wise. But sit here"—he made room for her upon the cushions—"and tell me, do *you* feel yourself, at last?"

"I"—Dorofée sank down upon her crossed knees as easily as any woman of the harem—"I feel—yes. At last, Barali, but"—her voice halted—"for so little, little a time. I must——"

"Time is never little," the Arab looked at her from out his deep, fierce dark eyes, "unless one is not living it. Ashes of Incense——"

She started.

"Ah! you thought I did not know that name. But I also have been to the Casbah (with faint irony), once or twice. I hear things. Ashes of Incense, you will smoke—yes, it will rest and

soothe you—and you shall tell me of that mask that you have worn all these years. And then ——” His eyes, looking into hers steadily, saw them dilate, darken; they were no longer pale and grey.

“Ah!” he leaned toward her till the sleeves of their robes touched. “But you cannot always wear it, no! And there will come a moment——”

She trembled slightly.

“Smoke,” said he, casually as a Frenchman, “and tell me.”

She took from him the long, fantastic pipe, that he had lighted, and leaned back against her pile of cushions, drawing aside the filmy face veil for an instant. Then, when she had the silver pipe stem firm between her lips, she took a long deep breath of the fragrant smoke, and began. From his seat not quite touching her, Barali watched; and listened.

“I have always been different from myself—you know, that night at the masque, you guessed it. You were the first, the only one, to cross my threshold of the soul, all-wise Barali. (By tacit agreement, they spoke in Arabic.) You took me out to eat an ice!—on the little balcony—and you said, piercing my mask with those terrible wise eyes, ‘this is not you; what are you?’ And I an-

swered, 'a doll, a pretty French doll.' You said 'no—what you are is—an Eastern woman.' You remember?"

"I remember." Barali's eyes were on the beautiful little arm raised out of its draperies to hold the pipe, so near him. He did not touch her; but she quivered—under the contact of his eyes.

"Since I was a little child in Marseilles," went on Dorofée, "I have found pleasure in being what I am not; so long have I been that, I scarcely know any longer what I am. Except—as you say—an Eastern woman. I dreamed, I had fancies; instinct assured me they were not the dreams and fancies of other people: I must hide them, keep silent, pretend I had others. I did this; I found life one long amusement, playing tricks on other people—with this strange thing I had that they had not. I called it subtlety: really I do not know what it is. Only it makes me different. So all my life I have been pleased, convincing people that I was the same—only *more* same than they. I have bored them—ah, the exquisite joy it has given me to bore them! All this till I was eighteen—and since; but—there was an interlude."

Barali leaned to her again. His eyes, now keen

as when he was sighting a gazelle, never left the eyes above the veil.

"I went to America, when I was eighteen, and all my relatives died. I got myself engaged to an American lady as *gouvernante*, and I went to Boston. I"—the low voice lowered still softer—to a curious, indefinable emotion—"I loved. I married. And—for a time, a shadow's space, I found what I had never known: wild happiness. Pleasure, delight, amusement, even ecstasy, yes I had known those, they were mine by my brain; but this—this happiness as of the night when one dashes across the desert on a mehari, this mad thrill of exultation by the body—no! Never had I known it. Never, since that winking of an eye—just a little year—have I known it."

"And"—the giant man at her side never relaxed his gaze, though she now looked far away from him—to the dim corners where haze and golden dust seemed to mingle together—"and what brought the end, Ashes of Incense?"

A low laugh filled the room. "My spirit, of course. My spirit of subtlety, that saw the humour, finally, of its being swamped in this love madness, and demanded attention for itself, and amusement once more. I saw all at once, how *funny* it was, for me to be in love at all, and with

such a man—a clever man!—I saw how funny, how *heavenly* funny he was, the man I had married, and I determined to play jokes on him, from that time forth. It was easy, because he has that odd thing they call a conscience—yes, you have the word in Arabic, though you have not the thing—Glory to Allah! It was that that first made me love Arabs.”

“Yes”—the dark, fathomless eyes probed her —“you love us. You shall love——” but he checked himself. “You,” he said slowly, moving a little away from her where he could regard her less closely, more keenly, “you are like a sheik with a garment of two colours: one side is grey, one side is scarlet. You cannot decide which is the more to your liking.”

Dorofée opened her lips to speak, but with a quick, imperative motion he silenced her. She obeyed him instantly.

“And does that not prove?” he triumphed. “Your master of the scarlet is man, he conquers you, you obey him. Your master of the grey—the pale, ash-grey, is your attacking spirit, that you call the spirit of jest, of subtlety.”

“And this?” Dorofée nodded to the rose and blue hat that one of the servants had brought in and placed in a corner.

"That is—but a domino. Not to be counted."

"I have worn it for eighteen years—since I was old enough to put it on, that domino."

"It may be. You will graciously forgive me if I say that it does not become you? Either the scarlet or the grey—though jesting does not give me pleasure."

"Why not?" she asked him curiously.

"The man who makes jokes is himself the greatest joke in the world."

She clapped her hands. "But you know that! you have guessed! But only to himself, Barali; not——" She looked up a moment, frightened.

"To himself, and—to Allah," gave forth the Mohammedan. "Allah, who has worn all jokes thin, must find the man or woman who does nothing but joke, the greatest jest of existence!"

"But Allah is not my god," murmured the low little voice, taut with some intense feeling. "My god is that grinning spirit—you know!"

"An Arab woman's god is her lord's god," Barali told her steadily; "when you have become truly an Arab woman, that spirit will have vanished for ever! Jest will have been driven out, with his pale, colourless pleasures; and scarlet!—the robe of madness, of exultation, of life, shall

be yours, my little moon"—he was speaking low, low, against her ear—"forever more."

"Forever more?" trembling, she half whispered it. "No, that is impossible. I did not tell you my greatest joke—my last that is to be—I did not tell you——"

"And do not tell me. You have come, you are here. You are in an Eastern house, the woman of an Eastern man: there is no to-morrow. For an Eastern woman there is forever but to-day! And that day, oh, my little soul"—he had taken the veil from her face and was drawing her nearer to him; nearer and nearer into his arms—"that day is forever man's! It is mine, rose of joy, it is *mine*!"

Looking up into the triumphant, fiercely beautiful face, Dorofée gave a little conquered moan. "It is yours," she murmured, closing her eyes under his, "the day is yours."

He bent to her swiftly; laid his lips upon hers, burning. She felt the hot sands of the desert, the rush of winds, the thunder and lightning of wild storms; and strangely, for an instant she saw Michael's face, but it had melted into the fierceness of those passionate dark features above her. In the tumult of Barali's embrace, she felt the grinning spirit that had ruled her slink by, beaten;

and her soul exulted that it was so. She raised her tiny, ardent arms and gave herself with a sob of abandon: it was finished. The mad scheme was finished; it might pass into oblivion. She was going to become an Arab woman, and for the rest——

“Pardon, oh my master”——there was a low knocking at the closed door, but persistent. “I must speak with my master, it is of grave importance. Pardon.” It was the woman Phaia’s voice. Always the low knocking went on. “Of gravest importance, my master.”

Barali went to the door, white fury in his face. He spoke to her words that Dorofée could not hear; words whose cut sent her shrinking back against the corridor wall. But she replied briefly, with the information she had brought. And Barali was forced to go back into that room but for an instant. “It is my father,” he explained to Dorofée, through set teeth; “my father, the marabout, has arrived in great secrecy, and for a few hours only. Allah! For no one else would I leave you, this minute—but my father—oh, little white moon,” he kissed her lips madly, yearningly, “you understand I must go to see my father, who comes on matters of great importance. Later—you will wait.” It was the voice of com-

mand that spoke to her. "You will wait. I will return."

She lay there, hearing him go out; it was as though her body were weighted with stones, she could not have moved. And through her mind passed strange visions; like the dreams that the scent brought her: the dreams that she was coming to trust more than her waking fancies. Yes, she was very tired; even this indefatigable brain thing had given out. She could think no more, nor feel: she would sleep.

But just then, as she was curling into the cushions, the door opened softly, and Phaia stood there, her great hips swaying gently. But with that odd lightness of some heavy women, she stole over to the divan, and whispered: "Would the little rose like to go? The father of Barali is come, and it will be many hours—very many hours, until my master can return. An English lady would grow impatient waiting so long; I have a chair to carry her to the side gate, if the little joy of Allah wishes to go?"

Dorofée sat up on her cushions. For a moment she had stared at the woman, stupidly. Then a pale, understanding gleam came back into her eyes; and—suddenly—she laughed. The woman Phaia started at the sound.

"So—I am here, surprised in my love-affair by my lover's father! I am put up on the shelf until he can come back to take me down; I who—oh, it is too exquisitely funny! Sublimely absurd! Yes, yes"—she rose feverishly—"I will go. Help me to dress. I will go at once."

As though from out of nowhere, the negresses appeared with her clothes—her Dolly clothes—and under their deft fingers, she was swiftly ready for the flight.

But—just as she turned to leave, "Will not Barali beat you?" she asked Phaia curiously. "You must say I escaped while you were out of the room. You must say—but who are you?" The eyes, once more pale grey, searched her.

"I am Barali's wife," said the woman monotonously; "his only wife. Of course he will beat me; are you a fool that you say 'tell him this, tell him that'? Of course he will beat me, what of that? He is my master. When I was young and slim like you—but go, hurry! He may return at any moment. Kala! Narbi!"

The two negresses threw a thick black woollen cloth completely over Dorofée, and carried her out between them, as though she had been a bundle of stuff. The next thing she knew, she was standing outside the wall (the back wall) of Ba-

rali's white villa; twirling the rose silk strings of her hat, and smiling—just a little, whimsical smile.

She looked back at the villa; one saw no thin slits of dim glass from here: every one said what modern ideas Barali had—just look at all those windows! Dorofée looked at them. Her eyes narrowed, just a shade. Her face contracted, almost with pain. Then she laughed, chuckled rather, to herself.

“Forever more!” she murmured, chuckling, “forever more! What a joke! You see,” she said back at the villa, “the grey is more to my liking, after all!”

VII

AT five o'clock that afternoon, Dorofée went into her blue and white room—to find Michael standing there, before the little table. “Where under heaven have you been?” he demanded, setting something down quickly.

“I have been to confess,” said Dorofée with her angelic smile. “I went into the arcades to do some shopping—a little present for dear Paula, she must be so depressed!—and then to lunch at an Arab place, and then—to confess. And what are you doing, Michael dear? What have you and Paula done all day?” Dorofée had hung up the forget-me-not hat and was standing opposite the little table. Two packets lay upon it—one had been spilled a little. Dorofée’s eyes were, quite evidently, upon them.

“Nothing,” returned Michael darkly, watching her; “why should you think I’d been doing anything?”

“Why, for no particular reason,” his wife laughed softly, “but that you generally do. I

mean to say every one does *something*, don't they? *What* they do, depends—well, on their conscience, I suppose?" The big, baby eyes raised inquiringly to Michael's. "Was there anything you wanted in here, Michael dearest? Did you"—looking at it—"want some of my scent?"

"No," growled Michael savagely. "I didn't want anything. That is—I was looking for you," he added angrily, "wondering where the deuce you were, and what possessed you to go off and leave your guest for a whole half-day."

"Dear Michael," Dorofée laid a soothing hand on his arm, "didn't you tell me she was your guest? And I thought, after all that happened this morning, you and Paula would have a great deal to talk over. So——"

"Nothing of the kind." Michael shook off the hand, his long, narrow face livid with irritation. "Besides," rudely, "what do you know about what happened this morning? Look here, if you listened——! I bet you've been up at the *Prince George* tattling things to that cad Templewaite! I bet"—certainly something had driven Michael literally very nearly crazy. His eyes bulged from under their sockets, and his hands, rammed into his pockets, twitched visibly. He was ugly, but—he had the look of the brute all about him.

Dorofée stared a little, fascinated. The image of his face that afternoon, when it had flashed between her and——! She recovered herself quickly.

“Michael, will you please remember that you are talking to your wife?” she interrupted with considerable emphasis. “I am your wife, Michael, and I always will be (Michael muttered something under his breath), and you shall not disregard me in this way—for any one.”

“Oh, shan’t I?” returned Michael, this time aloud.

“No. As for Mr. Templewaite—his affairs and Paula’s do not concern me in the least. I have never had the slightest wish to tamper with them. Though I am very sorry for Paula,” she added. “I think, Michael, she is growing too fond of you. “Yes,” decidedly, “devoted as I am to Paula, I must say I have been very much saddened to see a—er—a *carnal* element developing in this attachment of her higher soul; and I shall tell her so, Michael, I shall have to speak to her.”

“No, you won’t speak to her,” blurted Michael with strange assurance. “Because——” He stopped short.

“I shall,” said Dorofée firmly. “I shall tell Paula that fond as I am of her, I must insist on

her remembering that I am your wife, and that I cannot, will not be set aside—no matter though I am young and silly.” The cherubic little face grew gay again. “Now off with you, you big clever Michael. Anyhow you love me, don’t you, Michael darling?” putting two clinging arms up round his neck. “And no matter what Paula might do, you would never hurt me, would you, dear? You wouldn’t hurt even a hair of my head, would you?” All this punctuated with flut-tery kisses.

Michael swore; setting himself free. “Oh, no! No, of course not. I do wish, Dolly, you wouldn’t slobber so!—I hate mush.” And he strode off out of the room, his face a thundercloud—a very definite assurance of storm.

Dorofée gave a little skip of satisfaction. “The last straw has broken his back, eh Michael? And he came in to make sure”—she picked up the small packets carefully—“to see just how things were. *Eh bien*, it is *fait accompli*, I think, my scheme. And (she was taking off her frock before the mirror) the poor fools imagine that after to-morrow they are going to be quite happy. Happy!” the baby lips drew themselves in suddenly, sharply. “Poor, poor puppet-fools! Yes,” she acknowledged to the pale long eyes in the mir-

ror, staring at her with their strange unearthly stare, "though I have not a conscience, I pity them. They think that what they have is happiness—that washed-out shadow of a thing! They think it is—*mon Dieu!*" the tiny rose and gold figure dropped upon the white *chaise-longue*; stretched its dimpled arms languorously, dreamily, above its head. "They think it is *that!*"

When she looked up, after a long moment, she found the eyes of the Spirit of Silence fixed upon her, unblinkingly, all-knowingly. "But you—you know, eh?" she whispered, sitting up tense, her tiny face now truly but a mask for the fire that burned inside. "You will always know; and you will always keep silent. Simon, *mon choux*," rising, with a wholly 'Dolly' laugh, "you are the tomb of many strange, wonderful things. I wonder who will tell you their secrets after—the scent, Ashes of Incense, is gone?"

In the study, Michael had joined Paula, who was waiting for him.

"Well?" said she breathlessly.

"Well?"

"She caught you there?"

"All but. I should think you might have warned me, if you heard her coming up the stairs."

"I didn't. I only heard her laugh—after she found you."

"Oh, her laugh—God!" Michael dropped down into a chair, and covered his face with hands that trembled from excitement. "It's that laugh that's making me do this, I tell you. It's——"

"It is Fate," said Paula firmly. Since this morning—when he had promised—she had felt very firm. "There is no getting round it, Michael, it is Fate. Didn't she herself point it out to us?" Paula had the most obliging memory; it forgot or remembered other people's responsibility for her deeds, just as it pleased. "Didn't she say 'and your light is of course the true light'? Didn't she agree that sometimes one must suffer for the good of all—didn't she? Didn't she say she *approved* that man's action (no, they did not call it murder any more) toward his wife? Yes!" Paula's voice was shrill with triumph. "Dolly is the very one who suggested the whole thing to us—poor silly little doll! And now—I really believe you'd back out—now, when it's as easy as nothing, when it's as simple as——"

"No," said Michael, looking utterly wretched. "I won't back out. I've given my word and I'll stand by it. As you say, it's the simplest thing in the world—since she's told the servants about

nearly mixing the two packets, it's absolutely undetectable (he said all this over monotonously, as though he had said it a great number of times) ; and since this morning—when Templewaite comes out with everything, and tells people—where will you be, if I don't do it?"

"Yes," echoed Paula, "where will I be? A disgraced woman, a target for everybody's horrid gossip, a—oh, it's unthinkable! (I have noticed that with women of temperament nothing is unthinkable until after it has happened.) You love me too much for that, don't you Michael?"

She was sitting on the arm of his chair, bending over to him. It occurred to Michael, dully, through his gloom, that she was very big. "Of course I love you," he said mechanically. "What else do you think I'd be doing this for? Risking my life for? Risking——"

"There—there," Paula soothed him, herself growing calmer as he grew less calm; "it isn't as serious as that, Michael. Try to remember it isn't nearly as serious as that. Dolly burns scent, she is known by the servants to have grown careless about it—using too much and that—one night she lights a leaf as usual before retiring, and the next morning—she simply got hold of too big a leaf, that's all." Paula was positively airy

about it. One might have thought she had been planning these little *dénouements* every day. "Accidental suicide, that's all, Michael."

"Ye—yes." Michael looked at Paula with new eyes. That she could mouth such words lightly, easily, pierced even his moroseness—gave him suddenly an idea. "I say, Paula—you think so little of all this, find it so—er—natural, so trivial I mean——"

"Yes—well?"

"Well, why don't *you* do it, then? Why don't you be the one to——"

"My dear Michael," came from Paula very coldly, "do you think it shows very much courage, to try to shift your duty off on to a woman?"

Yes, it had become his 'duty' now.

"But it isn't that, it's——"

"Yes? what is it then?"

"Well, I don't see what difference it makes, whether a man or woman does it," blurted Michael, jumping up to pace up and down the Sultan's room. "In fact I'm not at all sure that it wouldn't be braver for me to let you do it."

"Michael!"

"Well, I'm not," doggedly. "You never were married to Dolly"—he paused for a full half minute, and the blackness in his face cleared to

an expression that made Paula's jealous inner self rage. "You never had anything to do with her," he went on in a quieter voice than he had used that day, "until a little while ago. She's nothing to you—never was."

"And what is she to you?" demanded Paula frigidly.

"Oh, nothing, of course; worse than nothing. But—she has been. And look here, you know, it would seem a bit more decent if you, instead of I—were to—to do it, you know."

"I fail to see why—if it is true that she is nothing to you." Paula had risen too, and was standing, the picture of outraged dignity, at one end of the room. "Of course if you still love her——"

"Love her? that cackling doll baby?" Michael's laugh rang out hoarsely, his face darkened once more. "Love *her*!"

"Then prove it!" triumphed Paula. "Prove that you do not, that you do love me—by freeing yourself so that we—you and I—can be married and Guy thwarted in his sordid plan to ruin me. Prove it, Michael, and I'll believe you. But if you ask *me* to do it——"

"But you said it was such a little thing," argued Michael, stopping in his pacing up and down

to look at her, wearily puzzled. "You've acted all along as though you thought absolutely nothing of it—the simplest thing in the world you've said. Yet when it comes to *your* doing it——"

"Listen, Michael"—she took hold of his arm severely—"we're going to decide this once for all: do you or do you not love me?"

"Oh, Lord," groaned Michael, "you know I do—how many times have I got to say it?"

"Until you convince yourself as well as me that it's true. Then, if you love me, and want to marry me, and can't marry me unless you get rid of Dolly—you say I didn't marry Dolly," she broke off, "no I didn't. And it's not my fault if when we—er—found each other, you weren't free. (Paula beautifully forgot that neither had she been free—until she told Guy the truth that morning.) No, it was yours, and it is your affair to get your freedom. Don't you see? You must see."

"But there might be some other way," he persisted stubbornly, "this is so horrible, so——"

"Do you want to get rid of Dolly? Yes, Is she driving you mad with her silliness and her everlasting laugh? Yes. Is there anywhere you can send her—has she any relatives at all, or any friends away from Algiers? No. And did she

not say—*didn't she*, Michael?—that she would like to lie and sleep under that scent forever? Didn't she?"

Michael shuddered. "Yes. Yes, she did."

"Then—what on earth is there for you to hesitate about? Everything (ah, if Dorofée could have heard her witness to the 'silly doll-baby's' success!) has been arranged as easily for you as though it had been specially planned. It is Fate, I tell you, Michael. And"—Paula's green eyes fixed themselves on him coldly—"you have given your word. You will keep it?"

"I—yes, I will keep it." Michael's face was white as death. At that moment he hated Paula. It is thus that women gaining their desire through men, lose them. "I'll—I'll add the large leaf to-night, Paula."

"That's right." She tried—Michael even in his tumult of feeling, was conscious of the effort—to keep the exultation out of her voice. "Now don't think anything more about it until to-night comes. Or even then. After all, you're only granting Dolly her expressed desire and winning everything for us at the same time. Oh, Michael, *dearest*, we shall be so happy! After to-morrow all our troubles will be over!—only"—a sudden thought struck her, as she sat down, relieved from

further struggle, on the sofa—"I suppose I shall have to go away from here—*after*. It wouldn't do for me to stay until we were married—it wouldn't be proper." Paula—Michael—and the proprieties. Oh, god of the ridiculous, Dorofée's god, did you shake your sides, hearing it? Certainly a sense of seriousness was all that remained to Paula out of the attitude of the higher plane. She drew Michael unwillingly down beside her, and for the next half-hour talked to him gravely of the details of their wedding, and how they could best—that is, quickest—propitiate Mrs. Grundy into sanctioning it.

Michael fumed. In spite of his conscience being in its death-throes, he possessed the remnant of good taste: he balked at discussing marriage with Paula, with Dorofée, as it were, still warm in the house! As soon as he could, he got away, and went to walk, in the garden, alone—black-browed and morose.

From a window above two pale grey eyes watched him, delightedly. His was the expression of unhappy guilt; of the first offender, but an offender not remorseful, only afraid. And Paula would screw his courage to the sticking point—at the thought of slippery, New Thought-Paula playing Lady Macbeth, the little figure back of

the persiennes above, half suffocated with mirth. Ah, but it was divine—all of it! The little person was so occupied with the sublimity of it, her greatest joke, that she did not notice her own strange aspect, as she dressed for dinner; did not see how her grey eyes dilated, burned palely in their purple-shadowed sockets, like the eyes of one living in a weird, self-constructed nightmare, in which the dream alone appeared real, and important. No. She only smiled—that small, satisfied smile,—and went down to dinner.

The meal over, Dorofée brought a little parcel to Paula. The latter was far from gloom this evening; every one of the very few folds of her sheath—sea-green to-night—gave forth suppressed triumph. “I have bought you a little present, Paula,” cooed Dorofée—they stood together by the fountain, Michael, like some hovering, inimical spirit, a few paces off—“I knew how upset you were this morning, and then I thought—I *hoped*, Paula dearest, this would help you to see your real duty, help you back onto the Higher Plane, into the more spiritual, the—er—less carnal attitude of self. It is”—she opened the box with a pleased little laugh—“a copy of the section on marriage, from the Koran. Don’t you

think the binding's pretty—and the illuminated letters?" she added, childishly eager.

"Very pretty," said Paula frigidly, taking the book in her fingers as though it were red hot. "I—you are of a peculiarly generous disposition, Dolly."

"I hope so," confessed Dorofée with sweet modesty. "Good-night, Paula, good-night, Michael—I know it's only nine, but I'm going up. I've a few things to do, and then—good-night! As sweet dreams to you as I shall have. Good-night."

"And good-night to you too, mother-in-law," she wrote, upstairs and ready for bed; "only it isn't the *very* last, as Michael and Paula think. I'm going to tease them just once more by hiding the scent to-night after I've lit my one leaf. When Michael comes to find it, it won't be there. How I shall laugh, looking at him in the dark from under my eyelids! It won't be there to-night; but to-morrow——! Good-night, mother-in-law. I have proved I could do it: I have re-made Michael, without a conscience (and really I had not known he could be so attractive as he is, reduced to brute!) and made him commit the three wrongest sins without an atom of remorse or shame therefrom. Conscience? Michael's has

been converted into a prose-poem. Pax, *belle-mère!*—our score stands tied, I think. . . . And, my little blue book that is me, *finis.*”

The deft fingers wrapped and addressed it; placing it ready for mailing on the white desk rail, together with a minute package like a jeweller's box. Then Dorofée put out the light, dropped a small brown leaf in the quaint silver crucible by the head of her bed, lit the leaf carefully; and hiding the two packets of scent under her pillow, crept into bed.

A heavy, sweet, sweet fragrance filled the room, thickening its shadows with a pale grey haze. An hour passed, two hours; and still the slow-burning leaf smoked on, at the head of the lace-draped bed. The tiny figure inside slept, profoundly; over by the window on a blue and white cushion, a great Persian cat slept too. Morpheus, with his leaden, torpid eyes, his wide-open mouth, had come to dwell in the frilly, *coquette* room, it seemed, forever.

But—not quite forever; yet! Some one—a clumsy interloper on the heavy stillness—knocked a Dresden shepherdess on to the floor. And some one else—the lighter of the sleepers—woke up; only partially, but enough to hear a softly vicious curse.

"Damn the everlasting gew-gaws!—might know it would be some of her doll-baby toys that would be in the way, and nearly finish everything. But (coming up to bend over the shadowy bed) she's fast asleep, thank the Lord!—and now where's that cursed scent?" The interloper was tiptoeing about, stumbingly, for by chance many objects and impediments had been left about for his big feet to trip over. "Ah, the table! and—*not here*, by God! *not here*." The bed-clothes near him undulated slightly. He turned with a start and listened; but only deep regular breathing met his ear. "Gone! she's taken it away. Oh, but I'll find it, my lady!" He stood at the foot of the bed, looking through the blackness at the phantom tiny head inside crazily. "I'll find it! and to-morrow, too. Curse you! you think you've got ahead of me, but you haven't. I'll find it to-morrow, and to-morrow night we'll see, my fine doll-baby? To-morrow night, yes!" With another soft, vehement curse, the interloper stumbled out again. And his wild, miserable eyes were replaced once more by the eyes of Morpheus, hypnotic and dream-laden; fixed upon the little figure in the lace-draped bed.

"Fast asleep! how delicious!" murmured the little figure drowsily. "And 'you think you've got

ahead of me'—oh, *mon Dieu!* 'But we'll see to-morrow night'—yes, yes, poor stumbling fool! But your voice had—I do not know what of attractive: it was fiery, yes; it was like *his* voice—duped by a woman! Yes, it was like *his* voice. To-morrow night. Simon, you are there, my little one? *Bonne nuit* again. To-morrow night you too—but now for one more enchanting dream—a dream that is the only real life. I wonder will it be about—a—ah!" with a long, langorous sigh—"This sublime Ashes of Incense!"

VIII

AND Dorofée slept; her worn little face turned toward the smoking crucible. But what she dreamed was this: she dreamed that the completion of her wonderful, exotic plan came true; that Michael committed the last of the three wrongest sins, and murdered her. And that her soul whirled out of that narrow white bed and into the Space she had longed for. Out there it was all light, and clear, and entrancingly free; but gradually it seemed to fill with shapes—strange elfin things, that crowded about, dancing and pointing, and calling to other shapes to come and look. They didn't seem able to make her out—though she was now, like them, a phantom thing; some said, indeed, they had been present at her birth, and had given her this and that—a sweet baby face, a cloud of shining curly hair, a rippling laugh—all the things she had valued and had used so inexhaustibly; yet something was the matter. She was different. She was alien. They could not understand. And there was great whis-

pering and flitting about and disconnected murmuring, until at last, "ah! the Spirit of Subtlety!" they cried, as a tiny humped elf flew in—all wrinkled and gnarled—and seized upon Dorofée and turned her about this way and that, mercilessly, measuringly. It was her god, the thing she had sacrificed to; the thing that in those what-other-people-called living hours, she had invoked to dream mad jests with her: yet it was ugly, cruel—it tweaked her about as she had tweaked her puppets. She shrank from it.

Then—ah, God!—all of a sudden it began to laugh! And laughed, and laughed and laughed, till the whole ether seemed to split with the sound. And every time it would try to explain to the others, all it could do was to point at Dorofée and scream with laughter. Finally Dorofée, crazed with the sound, screamed too: "What is it?—oh, what *is* it? Why do you laugh?" And all the others echoed "What is it? what is it?" and waited breathlessly; poised.

Then the elf, the Spirit of Subtlety, turned to them all, and doubling up again, it shrieked "*This? this?* this was a woman without a conscience! A woman without a conscience—why, it isn't a woman, it's a joke!"

And they all pounced on Dorofée and danced

about her, shrieking, "It's a joke, it's a joke, it's a joke!" And their wraith sides shook and their garments clung close and blew away again from laughing, while always they gave that maniacal cry "It's a joke, ha! ha! ha! a joke!"

And in the midst of that hell of laughter, Dorofée—at last—knew suffering.

She turned upon the grinning elf who had started it all, and beat upon its withered shape, and tore at its gossamer garments with all her phantom might. "You—you," she cried, "make them stop! Make them stop! Haven't I worshipped you all my life? Haven't I given up everything—my wonderful scarlet robe and everything to glorify you? And now you turn me over to these devils who laugh, these—oh! It's unbearable! It's impossible! Make them stop, I tell you, or I'll kill you whom I've worshipped. I'll——"

Suddenly the elf became very quiet, and motioned Dorofée to a place beside it in the circle, and "quiet!" it ordered. "I have something to say."

And the rustling ceased, and the whispering and pointing and mocking of Dorofée; the ether was ghostly silent, while the imp of subtlety began to speak.

"You poor fool," it said, with what dignity of

scorn, "and do you know this world so little that you think that you can *kill* anything in it? No: you are among the immortal spirits of all Time—the spirits of Truth, that can never die. And of these," proudly, "I am the greatest. You say you have worshipped me; poor fool, you have never even known me. You are but one of thousands on that silly earth who fancy they are in communion with Subtlety!"

"What?" gasped Dorofée. "*I* one of thousands?"

"One of thousands!" chanted the spirits of Truth derisively.

"You think that what you have is subtlety," went on the elf, puffing its wraith cheeks with mirth, "all of you, you more than any of the rest, perhaps—that washed-out shadow of a thing! (And to Dorofée, shivering wretchedly, the words had an earthly ring—as though she had heard them back in that frilly blue room.) You think that to be what you are not is subtle—*that!*"

And again the spirits of Truth roared, laughing.

"As though that were not the easiest, the crudest thing to be. Why, any one can be what he is not; in fact, scarcely any one can help being it. But to be what one is—that, that is subtlety; that

is the hardest, the cleverest thing in the earthly world to be: the only clever thing to be. And were you ever that? No."

"No!" howled the spirits tauntingly.

"You were only a deception—the commonest thing that is—the most usual. You thought that because you were an enormous deception that made you subtle—ha! ha! poor blind egoist fool!

"You thought that because you were a freak, you were a subtlety. But listen to this: the only subtlety that is, is truth. The only subtlety that is, is *natural*; the only subtlety that ever has been is of the *human*, and you—what are you?"

"What are you?" all the shapes echoed, pressing up about her.

"You are an *inhuman*," declared the elf, solemnly now. "You are that most pitiful of creatures, the abnormal, the unbalanced. You have rejoiced in that; you have hugged it to you and enlarged on it, that you were different from the rest of mortals; you have exaggerated your difference, instead of spending your life in the effort to lessen it. You have even—the mad audacity of it!—prided yourself on unmaking another creature, a human, he, to be like you, without a conscience, without sincerity or sense of truth, without any of the forces that have made the world go round.

You have done that—or tried to. And for that you are a silly thing, a fool—a joke!”

“Yes, yes, a joke! A joke!” they all clamoured, seizing on Dorofée, who was almost without consciousness now; beaten and bent over into a corner of the elfin ring.

“You are the crudest, the least subtle thing that has ever existed,” pronounced the Spirit of Subtlety inexorably, “a mental practical joker!”

“But what should I have done?” begged Dorofée faintly. “To have been truly subtle what should I have done?”

“You should have tried to become like other people; you should have seen that there is no one so beautifully subtle as the man every one calls stupid—who lets it be seen exactly what he feels and thinks——”

“Why, that’s Michael,” cried Dorofée.

“Yes, Michael!” shrieked all the imps of Truth, roaring at her.

“Whom you could have remade not less, but more human, more subtle than he already is,” went on the spirit, grinning its most ironical. “You should have realized that what you call the scarlet robe, is not what that creature of wisdom told you—at war with me for whom you discarded it; but that it is me and I am it—that the

things of the body, which appeal to you irresistibly (if you had not made yourself a freak), are a part of subtlety, and so beautiful, and above all human and to be desired. You should have worn your life out in keeping them—you had them once, one short little year, poor, silly fool!—not in trying to beat them under, for the sake of playing jokes with your ridiculous brain. Playing jokes!—and you thought that subtle? That from which you got nothing—nothing except an insane solitary laugh; for which you gave your one hope of humanization—your physical susceptibility. Playing jokes—oh ha! ha! ha! ha! but that is funny! You, the biggest joke of existence, fancying you were subtle! The inanity of it”

“The inanity!” screamed the other spirits, tweaking her about among them, “the inanity, ha! ha! ha!”

Then Dorofée knew that she could bear no more. She began to feel drowsy, overcome by torture and a thick sweetish odour that was filling her nostrils and clouding her eyes; making them all seem smaller and far away. “I can’t endure it!” she moaned, “I can’t endure it. Let me go. I’ll never try to be subtle again—I promise; oh, let me go! I’ll be like Michael, I’ll be human

and physical, and—and subtle as he is, yes! I will, I will. Only let me go . . . let me go back . . . let me . . . let me . . .”

She opened her eyes suddenly. She was in the blue and white room, with its knots of pink rose-buds. She was awake.

IX

THERE, in that frilled, beribboned room, there in that frivolous, lace-draped bed, there beside that smoked-out silver—"aiiihh!" she caught up the thing with a wild shudder of loathing, tore the bed-clothes away, and rushing to the window, hurled the scented crucible outside it; hurled it down, away beyond, and depths beyond—the thing of her undying hate. Then she flew back, unsteadily, totteringly—and felt under her pillow for two packets. They were there; yes, they were there. She snatched them up, the one barely more than a slip of paper, and tore and twisted them to bits, to nothingness, to powder. Then she flung the powder too outside, into oblivion; into that air that still shrieked and jeered and hooted at her. And finally she caught from off the desk a small wrapped book, and rent it open, tearing her childish nails upon the cord so that the close written pages of the little book were stained with blood, her blood, as she cast it from her into the open fireplace. A match—a whole bundle

of matches—fell into the heart of the pale blue thing and inflamed it. It burned, it flared high, it blazed and curled and danced about triumphantly; and then—it became ashes.

“Ashes of Incense!” from the white baby throat came a hoarse sobbing laugh. “White-grey and very soft and sweet; and—a joke! Ah, God, that I should ever know such suffering! Yes, you, my god, who have torn out my soul and given it for plaything to those howling spirits of Truth—you have made me suffer. You have beaten me, and deprived me of the fruits of all my sacrifice to you! you have struck at me through my arch-enemy, my sense of humour. A joke! No, no, it shall not be so—I say it shall not! You shall never conquer me, you grinning imp who laughed at me. I shall never be murdered, and die—to go out there, into that splitting, laugh-racked ether, into that place where they said I was—one of thousands *who have never known subtlety!* Well, I shall know it now—I shall! I will be more stupid than the stupidest, more human than the humanest; I will—what was that? use my one hope, my physical susceptibility, oh, oh, how I will use it! And I will get a conscience, yes! and a sense of right, and a sincerity; and I will remake Michael, all over

again, but I will make myself like him—they shall never say that he is cleverer than I. I will do it, I will do it! And when next we meet, you grinning demon who tortured me, you shall never call me a freak—a joke—ah, God! A joke!”

She sank, a shaking, sobbing bundle by the hearth. But all of a sudden she looked up. Over her little face broke an odd light. And rocking back and forth upon her knees, she cried, “oh, isn’t it funny, funny, funny!”

For hours she sat there, squatted like an Arab woman on her knees; her pale hair covering her like a shroud, her bowed head swaying to and fro monotonously—like an Arab woman’s in her hour of desolation. Like an Arab woman, she sat alone in her woe, and moaned faintly, half chanting, upon her crossed white arms. No one came to comfort her; no one came at all. Only the Spirit of Silence shared the still room with her; and it sat always apart, regarding, from a distance. It gave no sound.

At last the little figure straightened from its crouching; stood up wearily, and looked about.

“If I were human,” came from the wan lips with a faint irony, “I should take a month off, and have brain fever. But—there is too much to be done. ‘And the first thing’”—she made her

way determinedly over to the glass—"is to make myself as I am: beautiful, I think? Hardly, though, after this night! However," picking up the hair-brush, she started swiftly to work, "let us see what can be done in the way of illusion. I used to—but yes!" feverishly she twisted up the shining hair. "So! and that grey dress that Michael never saw—and perhaps just a touch—a *soupçon*—of *rose tendre*, to take away this dreadful whiteness. Yes—yes, I can do it—I can make myself so that Michael—will not want to murder me, I think!"

Michael, coming into the breakfast-room, stopped—stood stock still, as though electrocuted. His heavy eyes stared, glued open, terrified. "*Dolly!*—Dolly, is it you? Is it you—are you alive? No, no—I'm dreaming, it's the ghastly night again. No, no, it can't be—it's not you I see. It is—God help me!—your ghost! It's your ghost!" he sank shuddering into the nearest chair; hid his face from her.

"No, no, Michael," soothed the little creature in the grey gown—who sat there at the head of the table, pouring his coffee with the most natural air in the world, "it is not my ghost. On the contrary it is—very much me; at last. You will

get to realize that it is me—in time. You know (with a small smile) you always said that dimities didn't suit me."

"No—no." Always Michael was staring and staring—at the lovely shining hair, parted in classic simplicity over the little creature's ears; at the exquisite fine features, that the fluffy pompadour had always blurred; at the simple, cool, grey gown, with its knot of little red roses at the belt. And this—this was Dolly! Michael felt the cold sweat rise to his wretched forehead. This was the woman whom last night he had tried to—whom to-night he had sworn to——

"Now come and sit at the table, Michael, do," she interrupted gently—no, that quiet, compelling voice was never Dolly's! "Your coffee is getting all cold; and besides—I want to talk to you before Paula comes down."

Michael obeyed her; clutched a chair as though all tangible things were swirling round. In his mind he thought he was crazy—stark, raving crazy. For—that one fact had penetrated his benumbed sick brain forever—Dolly was beautiful! But beautiful! Never had he looked on anything so lovely. And from that he knew that he was mad: silly, simpering, beruffled Dolly whom he had—*all but got rid of*—beautiful!

No, this horrible night had been too much for him; he was dreaming, he was mad.

Yet he listened curiously to her voice, that pricked his dull lethargy to remembrance. "You see, Michael," she was saying, "it is like this (and surely he had heard that low musical voice before—yes, great Heaven! on his honeymoon!): you and Paula love each other." It was as though Dorofée had said 'have some marmalade.' "And I am in the way."

Oh, she would be simple enough, truthful, plain, crude enough to satisfy those grinning imps!

"I—I don't understand you," stammered Michael, trying wildly to collect his wits.

"Oh, yes you do," pleasantly, "and you mustn't say you don't. (Score one against you for lack of subtlety, she added with a twisted smile to herself.) I heard all the conversation with Guy yesterday morning (Michael started violently), and besides, I've had my eyes open—oh, very much wider than they seemed, Michael—and that's the truth," as though to some one beyond him. "Now the question is: what's to be done? Do eat an egg, Michael—yes, you must—here. What's to be done? I dare say," looking at him meditatively, "you and Paula

have often felt like murdering me these last few days."

"Dolly!"

"Oh, I don't blame you in the least! It was the most natural—ah—yes, the most natural thing in the world. But there might have been such nasty complications, eh, Michael? Like the man in Marseilles—and——"

"Dolly, for God's sake!" Michael's worn out nerves were clearly on the verge of something perilous. To be talking the ghastly affair over with *Dolly*! "For God's sake," he pleaded.

"I was only going to say that there are so much simpler ways of settling it," went on the low voice casually. It did not occur to Michael in his stupor of amazement that though Dorofée sat there calm, unlaughing, and *beautiful*!—she was not eating anything; that her eyes, almost black, were fixed and unnaturally dilated. "Now if Paula——"

At that moment Paula appeared in the breakfast-room door. Looked in—stopped, looked again; then came forward swiftly, incredulously, peering at the woman who sat at the head of the table. "It isn't—it isn't—*Dolly*!" Paula completely collapsed on to the sofa.

"Yes it is!" avowed Michael—feeling all at

once quite on his feet again. "It is," he declared, almost triumphantly.

"But—but what have you done to yourself? Your hair—where's your pompadour? And that lovely dress, and—oh, goodness gracious, everything! I think I'm going mad!" and Paula began to laugh hysterically, looking at Dorofée and then laughing and laughing.

But Dorofée did not suffer under this laughter. Rather it brought her assurance—of already succeeding in the minutiae of her intention.

"My dear Paula, surely a part of my hair and an old grey gown can't have wrought such a marvellous change," she said lightly. "Come and have your coffee, Paula, you'll soon get used to me, really!"

"No," said Paula slowly, "I shan't. I feel as though I should never get used to you. You're ——" she did not add 'beautiful,' but Michael knew she meant it. Dorofée knew she meant it, too; and the eyes that had been so palely grey rested on Paula almost gratefully. Only a woman could have told her that, as she wanted to be told: truthfully. To a man all attractive women are beautiful. But not to a woman.

"Michael and I were just saying," Dorofée

went on cheerfully, as she filled the other woman's cup, "something has got to be done."

"Yes?" Paula had sat down at the table now. She found wit to look at Michael, questioningly, forebodingly. Their last meeting—in the study——! To talk of——! Paula shivered wretchedly. What she had urged for the doll-baby of ruffles and frills struck horror on her at last; in the presence of this exquisite self-possessed woman who gazed at her with eyes so wise—so wise!

"Yes. You and Michael love each other. I am in the way," repeated Dorofée, handing Paula her coffee, with a smile of friendliest unconcern. "I propose," she said to both of them, "to rid you of me—oh, quite quietly, quite without sensation, there shall be no scandal—but—I think things have gone on this way long enough."

Paula gasped—as though a shower of cold water had suddenly been turned down her spine. Then she said, with a desperate effort at recovery, "So do I. And Michael?"

"Michael agrees with us—that is, don't you, Michael?" The beautiful little face turned to Michael inquiringly. Michael wanted to—to—he didn't know what. He only knew he wished that Paula were not there.

"I'm afraid I don't quite," he floundered mis-

erably—why wasn't he dead!—"don't quite understand you, Dolly—er—that is, Dorofée."

Dorofée over her mental shoulder, made a face at the imps: he had called her full name! He had recognized her self! "I say just this," she paused, to play for an instant with the little red roses at her belt, "Guy says you can have Paula if you will have her as your wife; that you can do only by getting rid of me. Good! I therefore take myself off, you and Paula marry, and—*voilà!*" Dorofée's expressive raised hands added "could anything be simpler?"

"I—really that is very sensible of you, Dolly." Paula in her amazement scarcely found breath to gasp it. "But——"

"I'm not sure that I agree at all," put in Michael—he was not sure of anything yet, this poor Michael, heavy-eyed for lack of sleep; heavy-hearted for feeling that everything in his life was whirling round on wheels, that he could be certain of nobody, nothing. "Where would you go, Dorofée? Where could you go?"

"Why"—then for the first time that morning Dorofée laughed—but a different laugh, light, but full of confidence, of a woman's pride—"I should go to some man, of course. I'm not unattractive?" she put it more as a suggestion, "I'm

young, I might please where I was careful to, and—that is my rôle! I shall go to some man.”

“Dorofée!” Michael jumped up, roused at last. “You—leave me—for some man—some—Dorofée, what are you thinking of?”

“But, my dear Michael, didn’t you—haven’t you left me for Paula?” Back of the dark grey eyes there lurked a faint amusement.

“Yes, Michael”—broke in Paula (who when it came to a question of thee and me—thee being another woman—rapidly got back self-assurance), “do be reasonable. Do,” urged the latter-day moralist, “be modern. You and I shall have each other; Dorofée will have some one else. Perfectly satisfactory *all round*.” Paula, beginning to regain her equilibrium, looked as satisfied as though she herself had suggested the entire arrangement.

“I don’t like it at all,” declared Michael darkly, sitting down again. Always he felt that he was dreaming, in all this bizarre talk. His own voice sounded strange to him. “Besides to whom——”

“But to whom else but Guy?” returned Dorofée innocently. “He——”

“No!” cried Michael and Paula simultaneously—then both looked utterly foolish.

“But why not?”

Quickly Paula recovered herself. "Dolly is right," said she, "after all, why not?" Yes, certainly Paula was modern.

"Paula doesn't love him," explained Dorofée, "Paula doesn't want him; and you, Michael," looking at him out of her wonderful dark-rimmed eyes that gave Michael a sudden mixture of strange emotions, "you don't want me. Now I may be conceited, but I rather think Guy will—I don't mean to say he loves me, but—I'm not so unattractive, am I, Michael?" with a little undulating movement toward him. "I might—I *might* please—yes, I think if I wanted to, I could please a man into——"

Michael sprang up, caught her arm, an entirely new expression on his face. "No, then, by the Lord you shall not!" he thundered. "You're my wife, and I don't intend that any other man shall have you! Do you understand?" He fairly glared at her—at both of them.

Dorofée smiled deprecatingly, at the same time swaying a little nearer the man who towered over her. He had forgotten the night, his horror, his black shame and remorse of just now. He remembered only the woman, the wonderfully beautiful woman, whom he had just found, whom he stood in danger of losing. "But then you don't

intend to have me either, Michael," she looked at him from under her long lashes, with a provoking upward glance, "isn't that rather—er—just a wee bit selfish?"

"I think it is, very," said Paula decidedly. Paula was rapidly getting back to the norm.

But Michael heeded neither of them. He was looking, and looking at Dorofée; at the more beautiful of the two women, looking and looking. It was as though he did not even realize Paula.

"And it will be such a *simple* way out," continued Dorofée, her eyes now on the coffee pot, "so fair, and even to everybody. You and Paula—Guy and I! What could be er—more *natural*—more, isn't it so, Paula?—just and equal for the universal good? Only—one thing I must tell you, Michael—I should have told you before—your mother is very ill."

"Mother?" Michael started—though still he looked with that odd concentration at Dorofée. "Mother ill? Why, what——"

"She has been ill for some time," Dorofée announced tranquilly, "days in fact; but I didn't tell you."

"And why not?" Paula quite bridled; with Dolly evidently culprit again, Paula found confidence to bridle; it was as though she was al-

ready Michael's wife, demanding Michael's rights.

"Oh"—the grey eyes half shut, with an expression that made Paula—used to baby vacancy in them—a trifle uneasy—"I thought it wasn't the time," said Dorofée, with absolute sincerity. "I thought it would only bother Michael."

"Bother me? Yes, but if a man's mother's ill, he—dash it all, Dolly, I don't see the reason for that! I think it was very queer for you to keep that from me, I certainly do!" And for the first time that morning Michael showed his old irritation at her.

Paula smiled; and took some bacon.

"My dear Michael," said the lovely little person with those all-knowing eyes, "of course it was queer. What have we, any of us, done during the past week that hasn't been queer? Can you tell me? Hasn't it all been like some strange fantastic puzzle we've been working out? Yes! *Eh bien*, I've the key to it for you, if you care to hear."

"The key?" Michael and Paula both looked up, alert—half fearful.

"Yes. It was *my* plan; it was I who was the destiny, I who arranged that you two should fall in love with each other, that Paula should leave

Guy and that you both should decide to murder me—yes! that,” the grey eyes shone black with excitement, “even that was *my plan*. I was the Fate, the impulse, the nagging, persecuting force that drove you along, until—the puzzle very nearly completed itself,” she finished quietly. (And now I hope you’re satisfied, added Dorofée to some one she did not see; if that wasn’t crude enough, laying the whole trick down, blank before them, on the table—if anything could be stupider than *that!* Or more subtle, came back to her, softly.)

“I don’t believe it,” declared Paula. Her fork had fallen from her fingers: she sat up, stiff, every muscle quivering defiance. “You’re making it up. You overheard something—and you’re making that up.”

But Michael, the simple man, believed her. He jumped to his feet, his face livid. “You—you devil,” he cried, towering over tiny Dorofée like a god of vengeance, “you mad-woman, to confess to such a thing! What do you mean? What did you do it for? What in God’s name could have possessed you to think of such a demoniacal thing?” The man who had all but done the demoniacal thing, who had been juggled by the whim of one woman, the desire of another, until

he and his conscience grew too dizzy to see, much less analyse what he did, caught the tiny arm that had guided him, held it savagely, while anger, the more furious because impotent, stormed down on her from his just-now heavy eyes. "Answer me!" he commanded.

"I was bored," answered Dorofée demurely; but her eyes—on Michael's hand, grasping the delicate arm so cruelly—caressed that hand. "I like you when you are angry, Michael," she told him, with another of those screened, upward glances that made of Michael's anger—nothingness; suffocated it, with all the emotion in him, into just yearning. With a quick breath he dropped the little arm; looked at her, speechless.

"All I can say," put in Paula, coldly disgusted, "is that Dolly has behaved outrageously. If it is true what she says, and she has actually brought about all this—er—(Paula hesitated to say sin; it placed her in such an equivocal position)—this wrong that has been done, then certainly she is the one who should right it. As I understand, Dolly withdraws."

"Exactly," nodded Dorofée, her shining head bent to conceal the twitching red lips—that refused to behave at all under Paula's sermonizing.

"And if I do not wish her to withdraw?" Michael found his tongue again. "If I refuse to allow her to withdraw?"

Paula shook her head impatiently. "But where would be the point of that, Michael? Do be logical! (It was something that Paula had never been in her life.) Do let us arrange things sensibly. Since Dolly has confessed to her horrid scheming——"

"I don't see that that has anything to do with things now," interrupted Michael stubbornly. "Nothing at all. I——"

"But, Michael"—impatience with Paula was fast reaching irritation—"it has everything! If Dolly has committed a crime against you, and in—ah—reparation gives up her rights as your wife——"

Michael was gazing at Dorofée; always gazing at the more beautiful, the exquisitely beautiful woman. "I don't want her to give 'em up," he said doggedly; "she—she shan't give 'em up. Dolly's my wife, and——"

"Now, Michael," said Paula (Dorofée sat silent, looking on), "do we have to go over all this again?"

"No—we don't," retorted Michael. "One thing you can't seem to get through your head,

Paula, is that I'm a man. I don't intend to have my affairs settled for me by two women—don't care what two women they are. Dolly's tried to settle 'em—came within an ace of doing it too (he glanced scowlingly at the little figure sitting apart from them. But gazing, the scowl turned to an unwilling smile); but she didn't. And now nobody shall. I'll do that, myself."

Dorofée, from under her lashes, applauded.

"My mother's ill; very well. The only thing to do, is to go to her. That I'll do, the minute I can get a ship from Gibraltar. Meanwhile, I'll cable, to get the latest news of her. But as to this other problem, as to you and Dorofée and"—his teeth came together savagely—"Guy, that's quite a different matter. One can't sit and settle a thing like that over bacon and eggs—*really!* You and Dorofée act as though murders and divorce and marrying people were a question of changing a yard of silk!"

"Well—and aren't they?" asked Dorofée, smiling her little smile down at the red roses at her belt.

"No"—her husband looked at her for a full steady minute—"they are not. I am beginning to realize that they are not."

And again Dorofée smiled slightly. He was

not bad, this renaissant Michael. "And what do you propose then?" she asked.

Paula had pushed back her bacon; was wrapped in heavy displeasure.

"I propose," said Michael, not looking at Paula, "to go on as though nothing at all had happened."

"But something has happened," broke in Paula sharply. "You can't——"

"Something nearly happened," Michael corrected, with an involuntary shudder. "I don't understand it, I never will I think, but—thank God it only nearly happened. And now——"

"Yes?" Paula's every feature was a-quiver with apprehension, with the intention also to fight. "Yes—now?"

"Why now," put in Dorofée lightly, at the same time rising, "you two are going to be left together; I am going to Guy—it is all settled, isn't it?" innocently she was leaving the room.

"No!" Michael almost shouted, springing up to block her way, "I say it isn't settled. Dorofée (ah, Heaven, but she was beautiful! It broke upon him every minute with new shock), you are my wife."

"Yes," from Dorofée doubtfully. Her long grey eyes fixed on the floor.

"I say you shall not go to another man—you shall not, do you hear? There's a law in this country," Michael quoted triumphantly, "and it forces you to live with me——"

"I have heard it said that when a man begins talking about his legal rights, it is a sign that his moral rights have ceased to exist," came from Paula satirically. Paula by this time was very white. If Dorofée stayed with Michael, what of her? A woman without a husband, without a name, without even a lover—"Michael!" in desperation Paula too threw down her hand upon the table. "What is to become of me, Michael?"

"Yes," Dorofée added quietly, "what is to become of Paula?"

Michael looked at them: the two women whom he refused to allow to settle his affairs, who stood waiting. Michael inwardly cursed. There was one too many women in the world for him just then: (rather the reverse from twelve hours ago) there was Paula. "I must think it over," he said confusedly.

"You must talk it over," amended Dorofée; "I shall go into the garden." With a little nod, she went out. Poor things—poor puppets that had been, she knew they had to go through this scene sometime; better now.

Head bent, she crossed the court, a strangely unnatural figure to the laughing, plashing fountain; and disappeared.

Paula looked after her bitterly. The beautiful slight thing with her shining hair, her nun-like exquisite frock, her quiet assured manner. "Then you aren't going to murder her?" she said very deliberately, turning to Michael.

"Paula! for Heaven's sake! don't talk like that—don't talk of that, *now!* Can't you see she's—it's all different?" Michael took the nearest chair, determining to 'get it over' as soon as possible.

"Yes." Paula too rose, sat down in another chair. She certainly was big! "I see—it's all different. Took a very short time, eh, Michael? A very short time. . . . Well, she is surely beautiful. One—a man especially—could hardly blame you. And then her sudden frankness—she has really been enormously clever about it. While you and I—have been the goats, eh?" That seemed to comfort Paula—"you and I"—"We've been the checkers, it seems, for that doll-baby to play with—particularly I."

"Now, Paula," began Michael, "I can't have you——"

Paula turned on him. Not all the eloquence of

the Higher Plane had ever lent her such dignity. "Michael," said she, holding her red head strangely erect, "it is not for you to say what you will or will not have of me. Do you understand? That's finished. I'm not a fool, nor blind; though I may have been both. I see. I see the *man* in a man's eye when he looks at a woman, when he compares two women. That's all, Michael—I think there's not very much for you and me to talk over."

"But, Paula, you don't understand." Michael looked the picture of misery—he could not better have proved her point. He was a man lost between two women. "You don't understand—I want to do the square thing with you, Paula; I'm not a cad, I want to——"

"No," she interrupted, "you're not a cad, you're just the next thing to it: a weak man. You want half a dozen cakes to eat and keep on having, all at once. That is, you did. Now"—with a faint sneer—"you want only—Dolly!"

Michael reddened. In his soul he knew suddenly that she was right: he wanted only Dolly—Dorofée, he substituted unconsciously.

"Well, there is nothing to prevent your having her, as far as I can see," Paula now was trying

to speak quite airily; "a man can live with his own wife, I suppose—now that he's decided not to murder her! But for a woman who's got no husband—a married woman—it is rather a different matter. A woman without a husband," she repeated slowly, the sickening grey creeping over her cheeks as she realized the words and their significance. "A woman with no name, no place to go—yes! I'm alone, Michael, alone, without even a name!" A short, dry sob shook in her throat. What those eyes of the Spirit of Silence had promised, was come to Paula. No escape. The closed door; and from every side, blankness, hopelessness.

"Paula dear," Michael moved his chair closer to her, and took her hand to pat it anxiously, "Paula, please, please don't be so unhappy. You have a place to go; you can stay here; you can stay here indefinitely. I am sure that Dorofée——"

"I stay here? with Dolly, while you go to America? (Michael jumped; he had not thought of going to America without Dorofée. In fact he was instantly sure that he did not intend to go without her.) Have you taken leave of your senses, Michael?"

"But why not?" cried poor Michael, very much

perturbed. "You've liked it here, haven't you? You've been happy?"

"Liked it? Been happy?" Paula almost screamed. "Michael Sargent, are you crazy? I believe, do you know, you are," she looked at him fixedly. "Liked it, happy—here in the presence of that eternal silly laugh, that chattering tormenting voice, that (her voice thickened) that loathsome, sickening scent! Liked it—great heavens!—have you liked it?"

"No," Michael said, very low, "but can't you see everything's different now; oh, I know, I've been a beast—as you say, I've been mad, crazed I think, by that eternal little laugh—I'd have done anything——"

"You very nearly did," reminded Paula, "*the last thing*. A few more hours of the Dolly that was, and——"

"Don't!" Michael trembled. "For God's sake, don't! I was crazed, I tell you. I——"

"You were," said Paula thoughtfully, "by me. By her, she says," laughing derisively; "and now—a plain grey gown and some parted hair have turned the tables—grand change! And with that, you ask me to stay on here—Michael, Michael!"

"Well—I don't see why not," contended Mi-

chael, "you wouldn't have to stay with Dorofée, you know. I'd take Dorofée with me."

"How awfully generous of you? There go, Michael"—Paula stood up with her new dignity, the dignity of conscious loneliness,—“go and send your cable, buy your tickets, go. Never mind me. I dare say I can have a day or two here, until you leave, to decide things; to make up my mind what is best for me to do. Meantime—but go, Michael.”

“Paula, I wish——” he began.

But she pushed him toward the door, peremptorily. “It does no good to wish. All that is over, between you and me. Go and buy your tickets, and—good-bye, Michael.”

“Good-bye,” said Michael innocently. Was it too with a breath of relief?

Anyway, he did not kiss her. Paula, watching his back as he crossed the court, thanked God fervently for that. And then—the bitterest moment came then to Paula, after all. For gazing after his vanishing figure, she knew that she had never loved Michael; his departure now, saying good-bye to him, gave her not a pang. That is, personally, outside the general sense of complete desolation. She had never loved him; and for him she had lost——! Paula had struck bed-

rock. She sank down in a chair by the deserted breakfast table, and buried her face in her hands.

After a while some one came and looked at her; some one—a little quiet some one in a grey frock, with pale grey eyes that darkened now with some quick perception. The little figure stood there in the door an instant, poised, considering. Then swiftly coming forward, "Don't cry, Paula," said Dorofée softly, "I'll get you out of it. I have a plan!"

X

PAULA raised her head. "Well, I hope it's a better one than your first," said she dryly. "That hardly seemed to appeal to Michael, did it?"

"Oh, Michael?" Dorofée tossed her head. "Who cares whether it appeals to him or not? Men, Paula, were made to be managed. Come along, we'll go up to your room and talk it all over!" And could anything have been more human than the way she tucked her arm within Paula's and skipped her across the court? Perhaps a gnarled elf was hiding in the laughing fountain; if so it must have danced with glee.

As for Paula, she felt as though she were acting in some show; she was even vaguely interested to see what the climax was going to be (for you remember the attitude of the Higher Self had fallen from her: she thought in the language of an earlier mood), on this impossible, theatric morning.

She followed Dorofée into the Room of the Favourites, with a sort of stupefied apathy. Then

—catching sight of the little figure sitting down quiet, no ruffles, no laugh, no childish swinging feet—realizing her as it were for the first time clearly, Paula laughed. A disagreeable laugh—one that made the other woman turn to her with interest in her eyes.

“How does it make you feel to have accomplished all this?” said Paula, her voice hard as the tiled walls about her. “You say you planned it, and carried it through—Michael’s and my—our falling in love, and arranging to—dispose of you, and Guy’s denouncing me and everything—how do you feel, now that it is accomplished, so successfully ended?”

Dorofée regarded her meditatively. “Rather foolish,” she said, at length; “it makes me feel rather foolish. Because—you see it *isn’t* successfully ended, I didn’t accomplish the thing I wanted to, at all.”

“You mean the murder?” with another unpleasant laugh.

“I mean—but I’m afraid it would take too long to explain. The affair now is to unravel—I wanted to ask you first, if you would like to stay here while we are in America—Michael says we are to go in three days; he telephoned just now, before he went out, and there is a boat from Gib-

raltar in three days. Would you care to stay here—do you like this room? No, Simon (as a pink nose and grey whiskers appeared in a crack of the door), you must stay outside.”

“I hate this room,” said Paula with a vehemence that included Dorofée in its hate. “I wish I’d never seen it.” Though the Spirit of Silence had been shut outside, she could feel his pale remembering eyes upon her.

“Then you wouldn’t like to stay here?” went on Dorofée tentatively, “or in my rooms or Michael’s?” The eyes beneath the parted hair held in them no delight; only an understanding.

“No—no!” Paula pushed the heavy Titian bands off her forehead. “Not Michael’s room, not yours—oh no, no!”

“Do you know, Paula,” Dorofée observed irrelevantly, “you have very pretty hair—really lovely hair. Why don’t you try doing it parted—don’t you think I look prettier with mine parted?”

“Yes,” said Paula ungraciously, “of course. You know you do.”

“Then why not try yours that way?—see, Ill do it for you; come over here.”

And gently she urged Paula into the chair before the silver mirror. “Just wait—it is going to be *beautiful*”—and a hint of the old childish-

ness came back, as the tiny eager hands let down Paula's tight bandages into long, gleaming red waves that made a cloak about her. "Oh, Paula, it's lovely—and you have such a lot! It's never half shown before. Wait," and the quick, deft fingers set to work.

Paula looked up dumbly. She was more than ever sure it was a show; that she was playing some subordinate, mechanic part. When she saw her face below the rich, soft waves of hair, she was sure. This was never she, Paula Templewaite—the Higher Soul, the prose-poetess; this was—she gave an inarticulate little cry.

"Just as you were when you were married!" echoed the understanding low voice. "Is it not, Paula? Just as you wore it when you were married, look! Oh, I think it is *beautiful*—it makes you look just eighteen. See—take the glass;" quickly she placed a mirror in Paula's trembling hand. "Isn't the back nice?"

Paula was gazing; turning her head and the little hand-glass slowly around; gazing and gazing, her face a struggle of emotions. It happened that she had put on white to-day, one of the few white gowns she had, a little open at the throat; and Paula's throat was beautiful. Guy had once said——

"How did you know?" demanded Paula queerly, setting down the glass and facing Dorofée. "How did you know—I used to wear my hair this way?"

"Why, your husband told me," said Dorofée innocently, always watching the impressionable, struggling face. "He said, talking of the time you were married, 'she was the sweetest, most unaffectedly pretty girl in the world. She wore her hair parted then.' So—of course I knew."

"Guy said that—to you?" Paula left the silver mirror and went over to the niche by the window—not the middle niche. Both she and Dorofée carefully avoided that.

"Yes." Dorofée came and sat beside her, in the window. "He said you were just that. And then he added, 'and to me she's never changed. To me she is the wife whom I married, and whom I've loved more every year since.'"

"Oh!" Paula's voice came over her shoulder. She was staring fixedly out the window. "But he won't have me back. He said I should never return to him, not"—she drew in her breath—"not if I begged on my knees. That's what you planned too, I suppose?"

"Did he say that?" The small hands arranged a hair-pin in the bent auburn head. "Yes, that

was about what I'd planned—what I'd thought he'd say. Men are mad creatures. They get so worked up, so frightfully upset—over us—it's rather nice, I think—rather—er—*human*. Do you know," turning Paula round by the shoulders till their eyes met, "I think you would not have to beg Guy on your knees. I think you would have to say—just three words."

"No—you don't know," faltered Paula. Then she remembered; Dorofée did know—everything. "What are you talking to me about it all for, anyhow?" demanded Paula sullenly, and she shook her shoulders free. "It's all your doing, isn't it? You'd better let it alone now. An hour ago you said *you* were going to Guy."

"Oh, the things one says," retorted Dorofée, "they're of no consequence at all. *Something* had to be said, didn't it? You and Michael were too dazed to speak at all. *Of course*, I said I was going to Guy. When things get wound up tight like that it's absolutely necessary that somebody should say something they don't mean—to start the unwinding—to arrive at what they do mean. Paula, answer me just this: do you want to—will you, return to your husband? Leaving aside what I have done, what he has said and all, will you return to him?"

"I don't know what I'll do," said Paula, still sullenly. "There's nothing for me to do. You and Michael go on to America and leave me alone. Don't bother about me."

"I've got to bother about you," cried the little voice. "It's the right thing for me to do, the human thing. Listen: if Mr. Templewaite comes here, comes here to this house, and asks you to go back, will you go, Paula? You will?—you will, Paula?" Insistence, pleading, sweeping with a tremendous earnestness, encompassed Paula from those compelling grey eyes. "Yes, you will," said Dorofée, forcing the silence, "you must. It's the only way out."

Then Paula sat up, numbly. "Yes," she realized aloud—"it's the only way out. If—Guy hasn't already ruined me; doing what he said. Oh, Dolly, you don't *know*"—she broke down suddenly—"Guy said he would tell people I no longer bore his name. He said—my God, do you *understand*, Dolly?" Paula was sobbing—in Dorofée's arms!

"And what if he did, Paula? Haven't you"—Dorofée's voice was almost soft—"said things to Guy, things that at the moment you were sure you meant, and then afterward—never carried out?"

The remembering voice trailed off—could it be compassionately?

"Yes," murmured Paula indistinctly, her face still buried on the grey shoulder, "I said to him that I'd never leave Michael, that—— Oh, you know what I said to him!" straightening suddenly. "You know everything. Why am I talking to you about it?"

"You are talking to me because I got you into this," very quietly, "and I am going to get you out. You told him you would never leave Michael, and now you are quite ready, willing, to leave Michael—is that it? Then Paula, can't he—can't your husband have changed just as much in this short time? (Paula started.) It was yesterday, wasn't it?—when you saw him here?" continued the tranquil, reassuring voice. "Don't you think he can have changed his point of view, as well as you?"

"No," Paula raised her swollen, tear stained face, "no, because he was right. I'd sinned against him, and he knew it; and he was right. People in the right don't change, Dolly."

"Oh!" said Dorofée—very slowly. "But—how can they be sure they are in the right?"

"Why—why they just *know*, that's all," Paula

looked at her bewildered. "Right's right and wrong's wrong, and—they just know."

"Oh!" said the little voice again—almost wistfully. "And so he was right, because you were wrong?"

"Yes." Paula sighed deeply.

"And since he knows he was right and that you were wrong, nothing can change him? He won't retract?"

"No." Paula, who knew him, sighed more deeply.

"But"—the big, grey eyes lengthened, till they looked almost like an Arab woman's over the veil—"suppose some one were to persuade him that perhaps he hadn't been right after all, that perhaps he'd been wrong, and that therefore he owed it to—to his conscience to make the wrong right—wouldn't he do it? Wouldn't it be his *duty* to do it?" The voice in its hurrying eagerness was the voice of a child at school—a child impatient, thirsty to learn.

"Ye-es, if he were to see it that way, perhaps it would be—his duty," answered Paula, though always hopelessly. "No one could ever make him see it that way, though, Dolly. No one *could* ever see it that way."

"*Qui vivra, verra*," returned Dolly, actually

gay. "I think I can promise you, Paula, that by to-morrow night you will be out of this room—that Mr. Templewaite will have come, and you will be a very much happier person than you are this minute."

Paula looked at her almost stupidly—yes, it was she now who looked the baby, with her girl-ish parted hair and V-necked frock—a big, beautiful, unhappy baby, sitting dependent at Dorofée's feet. "Why do you care if I'm happier or not?" she asked wonderingly. "Just because you think you got me into a scrape, and are in honour bound to get me out? That's nonsense. I'm grown; I can take care of myself. Why don't you, as I said, go on to America and not stop to bother about me? Oh, Dolly, what's happened? What's come over you? What *are* you, anyhow? Do tell me, won't you? If you knew how my head's going round with all this!" She really looked half crazed, with her long white hands pressed to her temples.

"Why—I got tired of a pose, that's all." Dorofée met her eyes with absolute *honesty*. "It was a pose, those ribbons and frills and things; I took them up in the first place because I was bored, and—I got sick of them. *Sick* of them," she repeated, her grey eyes blazing till Paula

shrank back, frightened. "Don't you think one does get sick of a pose, Paula?" more lightly. "Doesn't the time come when it seems a bore—I mean," hastily, "not sincere?"

"Ye—yes," said Paula, very low.

"Aren't you rather bored with yours? Don't you rather want to shed the Higher Plane, and the Inner Good and the prose-poems and things, as I did my frills, and go back to being that prettiest girl in the world, that most unaffected girl? Don't you really, Paula?" The voice shook a little. "Don't you really want to be sincere, too?"

Paula's hands were clenched tight. The red spots that meant passion—of one sort or another—burned in her cheeks. She sat straight as an arrow in the window-seat. "I—I—if I do," she spoke very fast, "then I must tell you something. I must begin by telling you everything. For you don't, you can't know *everything*. You can't know about my meeting Michael and going to the farms with him, you can't know all that—that's happened between us since I came here. That—that night when you came to the study to look for Simon," she shivered violently, "and many other times, and then (Paula's words were tumbling over each other, a holocaust) about the scent—ah! but"—she stopped brusquely—"I for-

got. You *planned* it—no, no, not that—it's too horrible. You may have planned for Michael to get rid of you, but not that way, Dolly, not——"

"Hush!" At last Dorofée's quiet voice was shrill. "Don't—don't mention that scent to me! I loathe it, I won't hear of it—do you understand? You shan't speak of it to me?" Then more gently, at Paula's manifest terror, "For whatever I planned, Paula, that stuff paid me. It was vile—accursed. *Ashes of Incense*," said Dorofée slowly, "is destroyed—for ever more."

With the last words her face lightened; a whimsical smile came into the long Arab-like eyes. "What one lives for, Paula," said the tiny woman in grey, looking more than ever beautiful, "what one lives for is man. To be a man's woman—is it not so? Wasn't that what you married for, Paula?"

"Yes," said Paula, moving unconsciously a bit nearer to the other woman. "Yes," half under her breath, "it was."

"It's what every woman marries for—who is a woman: to find her master. A-ah!" The lovely little arms went up over Dorofée's head, with an unoccidental languor. "To find one's master—that would be Paradise of Allah, I think."

Paula was silent. It came to her that she had

never seen her master in Michael; no, rather had she always had to rule him. But Guy——! Paula drew a deep, quivering sigh. "Dolly——yes!" she stood up suddenly, her temperament this time not a matter of vocabulary, but of vibrant pulse, thrilling remembrance. "I'd crawl back to Guy on my knees! I'd remind him——"

"Yes?" Dorofée swayed toward her, in her interest.

"Never mind," said Paula shortly.

"I don't have to. And you too, Paula, never mind; you shall be with Guy to-morrow night; I promise you. Now I'm going"—the lovely little face looked all at once white and exhausted; as though relaxing from a tremendous strain—"I think it would be a good thing if you took some rest too, before lunch, Paula. We're all rather wrecks, after this morning."

"And last night," added Paula wanly. "Very well, Dolly—I'll rest. And"—she hesitated a moment—"I don't know why I don't hate you any more, but since you've been in here——"

"You pity me," said Dorofée with a twisted smile, "that's why. You have a conscience, and it tells you I've done wrong and must be suffering, and——"

"Are you suffering?" asked Paula blankly.

"*You?* why no, I'd never thought of such a thing."

"Hadn't you? Well, try to. Try to think of suffering in connexion with me," begged Dorofée vehemently, "and remorse, and repentance, and a sense of duty tortured by the knowledge of what I've done; try to think of everything that's human, and feels pain and drinks the dregs of physical agony—will you? will you? Because," curiously she said it, "that is the way you can pour coals of fire on my head—the only way."

And, leaving Paula standing there, dumb-founded, not in the least comprehending, Dorofée left the Room of the Favourites. Simon, waiting outside the door, followed her noiselessly down the tiled corridor, where now the noonday sun was glaring; and into—I had almost said the frilly blue room that was Dorofée's. But there was no longer a frill to be seen. The lace draperies, the blue bows, the rosebud cornered rugs—all had vanished; to give place to the simplest white linen such as covered the furniture when Dorofée was away, and two green burlap mats—brought down from a dusty corner of a closet, where they had been stored.

"Yes—I worked this morning," Dorofée from the door regarded the room, slightly smiling. "I

have worked this day," she repeated—as though to some one there with her in the room. "Do you hear? I have worked like the crudest human. I have not even thought once of my brain; I have only used it. Is that subtle? Is that natural? I have been what I am—yes, Simon," meeting the pale all-knowing gaze of the Spirit of Silence, "you know that to-day I have been what I am. And now," coming into the room, with a little spent sigh, "I shall rest. If I could have afforded the time, I should have had brain fever; but as it is—I shall rest."

She took off the fatal grey gown—fatal to the deception of Michael and Paula, and got into the simplest of her *négligés*; it was white, a slim kimono sort of wrap, that some one of her indulgent women friends had given her, but that "Dolly" had never worn. It seemed to fold itself round her, naturally, as all supple clinging stuffs did (when, rarely, she had let them). She curled down into it luxuriously, on the *chaise-longue* and closed her eyes; her wonderful shining hair fell all about her. Simon, from his cushion by her side, regarded it blinkingly. To him it was an enormous gold spiderweb—that he had found it useless to try to untangle. All at once, Dorofée stirred—as though with a sud-

den thought; opened her eyes, and reaching out to where he lay, always a little away from her, took the cat in her arms, and drew it close up to her. "There!" said she, cuddling the amazed Simon. "That's better."

Just then some one knocked—softly. And "May I come in?" asked Michael, opening the door a crack.

The woman on the *chaise-longue* gave a low, musical laugh—like an Eastern woman's laugh. "But of course! Would I not exchange a cat any time, for"—her eyes lengthened at him, half shut under their lashes—"a king? That is what Arab women call their husbands, you know," she told him, as Michael with a strange, newly-awake expression on his face, advanced into the room—" 'my king—my most glorious' !"

"Do they?" Michael was gazing and gazing at her. In the grey gown she had been beautiful; but here in this film of clinging white stuff with her lovely hair all about her, falling like a radiant veil—Michael sat down near her, breathing quickly. He did not notice the cat whom he hated, when it walked majestically away; he only saw the woman.

"*Alors*, and what did you find out?" she asked him lightly, (where the cat had been there was

an empty space beside her) "what did you come to tell me?"

"I came"—his good-looking face flushed, he laughed awkwardly—"I don't know what I came for; I've forgotten."

In the back of those long eyes lurked triumph. Triumph and—"Then come and sit over here," suggested the low, liquid voice, "and I will try to make you remember!"

XI

"I WISH to see Mr. Templewaite," the tiny lady in grey told the porter of the *Prince George*, "and—it is very important (she gave the man some silver)—you will make Mr. Templewaite understand?"

The man smiled. "But certainly, Madame. Madame will wait in the little alcove, beyond the salon, isn't it? I will fetch Monsieur there."

Dorofée nodded, and passed on through the hotel. She remarked, with an absent smile, that the porter, though he had seen her many times, had apparently not recognized her. Perhaps he was only discreet; or perhaps—she walked up to a mirror in the secluded little alcove and gazed into it. A small face, so white it was almost transparent, looked back at her: a face whose delicately beautiful nose and mouth were no longer over-shadowed, lost, under a blur of pompadour; whose great dark-shadowed eyes, set wide apart beneath the clear white forehead, could no longer be mistaken for blue—for any-

thing else than pale, pale grey, rimmed with dense black. Yes, she knew negligently, the face under the fine black straw hat was beautiful. Since yesterday—she smiled this time with a secret, mysterious satisfaction—she had been reassured as to its beauty. Ah, what she had had yesterday, had been better than playing jokes. Better than—being an Arab woman? The long eyes lowered, speculatively. Just then from the other side of the cool, faïenced alcove, Guy Templewaite came in.

Seeing Dorofée, he started involuntarily. "Is it—Mrs. Sargent?" He came forward, hesitating, quite uncertainly.

"Yes," Dorofée answered, faintly amused at his surprise. "We said, you know, I—I might as well not pretend; so—it's I."

"I see," said Guy Templewaite gravely. "I am glad." For some reason they found themselves shaking hands. "And you came——?" he sat down, politely inquiring. He had the look of a man who has not seen bed for a good many nights.

"I came"—Dorofée sat forward a little, watching him—"to tell you that Michael and I are going to America the day after to-morrow."

"You and—Sargent?" Guy raised his head

and gave her a long, wondering look. "You and Sargent are going to America, *alone*?"

"Yes." The grey eyes looked back at him steadily. For the first time in his life, Guy realized suddenly that he was at ease with her; perhaps it was the quiet, self-contained voice, or the grey gown, or—— "Michael's mother is very ill, and asks for him always; and—Michael agrees with me that his place now, and for some time in the future, is America," finished Dorofée with deliberate significance.

"Then what——" Guy Templewaite sprang up swiftly; then sat down, rather embarrassed at his momentary lack of control.

"Paula will stay here," said the little lady in grey distinctly. "She will be—quite alone. It was that, too, I wanted to tell you."

"I have no further interest in—in the person you speak of, Mrs. Sargent." Guy's voice was like ice, with—somewhere inside—a bed of hot coals. "She—please believe me—she no longer bears any relation to me."

"Have you told any one else that?" asked Dorofée quickly. "Oh, I beg your pardon (as he stared at her speechlessly), I—I'm not just impertinent, but it's that, don't you see, that I must know. Have you told any one—here in Algiers

—that Paula was—was no longer any relation to you?”

“No,” said Templewaite shortly. “Because I’m going away at the end of the week myself, and—and I’ve been busy packing,” he ended lamely. “I haven’t had time to go anywhere or see anybody. But——”

“Ah!” Dorofée drew a deep breath. “Not yet! And you too go away this week? To America?”

“No, to Europe. The man I—I went to Gibraltar to see”—Guy’s knuckles were white, where his hands clenched together—“took my play; and I’m going on to Paris and then to London to rehearse it with him.”

“Oh!” It came to Dorofée suddenly that on *that day*—the day of Guy’s return—no one had thought to ask him about the play; whether his trip had succeeded. Nor had Guy thought to tell them. The stage, that day, had admitted of but one piece: melodrama. But now (the rose lips pressed into determination) the curtain should rise again; on something natural, comedy. “So you go to London, we go to America,—yes Paula will be alone; quite alone. Er—this play you have written, Mr. Templewaite,” she went on hastily, those eyes that saw everything fixed on

his face, "you said, I think, that it was not a play of the Larger Soul, but of—small, petty human souls who were trying to keep brave, and abreast of life? Tell me—you didn't before, you know—did they all succeed?"

"Why no"—Guy looked at her, surprised. Would he ever understand what she really was, and what she wanted?—"no, of course they didn't all succeed. Everybody"—he smiled at her with his old frank friendliness—"everybody can't keep brave, you know."

The grey eyes lit—turned on him like a pale, piercing searchlight. "No," said Dorofée slowly, "everybody can't keep brave. But—but I should think it would be the *duty* of those who could, I should think it would be their duty to help on the less successful ones, wouldn't it? To help them on, and then when they fell down, so help them up? Don't they do that in your play, Mr. Templewaite?"

"Some of 'em do," said Guy tersely, staring, out of the window. It was absurd, of course, to think that she meant that—this strange, unexpected little woman; still——

"There was something you said once," went on the strange little woman, with her canny, quiet eyes, "something along that same line, that I've

often thought about these last few days,—you said, speaking of Paula, your wife”—on the words, the soft voice dwelt a full, impressive minute; Guy’s broad shoulders twitched a trifle—“that you loved her such a great deal more now, since five years, because you had her faults, as well as her bignesses to love. ‘That makes more, doesn’t it?’ you said.”

“Well?” Guy’s pleasant voice was distinctly abrupt.

“Well—and then you added, ‘doesn’t it make more with Sargent—with your husband?’ And I (Dorofée’s hand went up suddenly to cover her mouth for an instant), I answered that Michael had no faults—that beside him I felt just a silly handful of putty. That sounds irrelevant to you, now, perhaps; but”—the slight figure straightened, as though to some supreme effort—“if you knew, as I know, that it has been Michael who has been putty—Michael and Paula—if you knew that——”

“Mrs. Sargent,” Guy’s tone was wearily cold, “please believe me, all this does not interest me, has no longer anything to do with me. In a case such as the one you speak of, results are too glaringly assertive to invite speculation as to causes. I assure you, my only wish is——”

"To sit back and fold your hands, now that Paula has fallen into that volcano?" suggested Dorofée quietly.

Guy turned round and faced her, his eyes ablaze. "If you've come here from Paula to try to——"

"Please," pleaded the voice that had told Paula to 'never mind,' "Paula does not know, I am sure, that I have come. I—left Paula busy packing too," she added, always watching him.

"Packing—to go where?" cried Guy involuntarily.

"She doesn't know. Only—she says, she told me yesterday, that she could not stay there in our house, in Michael's house, any longer. She said she *hated* it, and she's parted her hair again, and she's going away."

"But she hasn't any money," blurted Guy again. "Oh, but I suppose——" his dark face fairly blackened with the thought that succeeded.

"I don't know about the money," said Dorofée serenely, "but Paula is going away. She will be quite alone. We had a maid, Amande, who was quite alone," added the childish voice musingly, "her mother and her mother's mother were

dead, and she was very beautiful too. She went at last to the Café du Soleil—you know that place?"

"Yes," said Guy briefly—his face now was as pale as death. "You don't, I hope?"

"No. But Amande, who was alone, came to know it. Do you imagine she likes it, Mr. Templewaite? Do you think she is happy?"

"Oh, how should I know?" Guy moved in his chair desperately. "Look here, Mrs. Sargent, just what *have* you come here for this morning? What is it you're trying to get at?"

"I am trying to get at—your conscience," replied that vehemently *honest* little voice, with an odd quaver in it; "I am trying to make you see that you have been perhaps not so right as you thought, and that—she—has been not so wrong as you thought. That's why I came, Mr. Templewaite." The small hand caught at Guy's sleeve and urged him down into his chair again. "I don't see *how* you can know, always, when the—the influences that have been brought to bear on the wrong person are so quite beyond your knowledge. You know only the results—you don't know at all the hand (curiously she looked at her own tiny fingers) that came up from be-

hind and—pushed her into the volcano. Do you?” she insisted.

Guy looked at her almost angrily. “Mrs. Sargent, since you compel me to talk about this horribly painful matter, I can only think that you have some reasonably kind motive in it. But believe me, nobody *forces* a woman to be unfaithful to her husband, nobody pushes her (he laughed sardonically) into the volcano of the other man’s arms. Unless it is the man himself—damn him!” he muttered under his breath.

“Well,” Dorofée drew a long breath, “even granting you are right, granting that she wasn’t influenced, and that she was as wrong as wrong could be, then what are you?” The grey eyes poured their all-knowing light relentlessly into his; the small soft voice talked very fast. “What are you? who couldn’t bear, oh no! to see her standing there on the brink and not reach out to help her keep her balance—who couldn’t *bear* that; but who can now stand by totally unmoved, arms folded, not a finger lifted to draw her up out of the scorch that’s half killed her with its punishment, who said she was only a child in experience, a baby, yet who’d leave that baby alone in the dark, terrified, maimed for the rest of its life because it’s stumbled on its pretty dress while

you weren't there to watch it? *Mon Dieu!*—is that *right*? I ask you, Mr. Templewaite, is that sincerity?—you who said it was Paula's very weakness that had made you love her more?"

"Mrs. Sargent," Guy's teeth were set into his under-lip with a mighty effort, "you can't understand this thing—you can't see it from a man's point of view. Paula not only *told* me, but she told me exultantly. She was glad, she was happy. There was no sign of punishment about Paula. And she defied me, said she'd never return to me, never."

"Ah!—but suppose she would return to you now, suppose——"

"Never!" said Guy Templewaite inexorably. "You may take back your husband—women generally do, poor creatures!—but I Paula, never!"

"Not even if it should mean—Café du Soleil?" suggested the little voice softly. "Or just as bad?"

Guy bit into his lip again. "Never. I'll give her money, but——"

"Then you are a coward!" The tiny figure sat erect, as though to take aim. "You are a coward (and her words hit him square between the eyes), for you tried to get Michael to give Paula up, on a lie. Yes, you did!" as he sprang

up, towering over her. "You told Michael, I heard you, that no matter what Paula did or where she went, you'd still love her; give up everything on earth for her. You used that plea to its limit with Michael—and it was a lie. You've proved it was a lie, for you won't give up even your hurt pride for her. Ah, you *deserved* that Michael should have her, Mr. Templewaite. You weren't—*sincere*."

Still he stood over her, towering, white with anger, for an instant. Yet even if she had been a man, it is doubtful if he would have killed her; he had a curious sensitiveness to justice, even when it attacked himself. He sank down into his chair without a word. Even a woman without a conscience must have pitied him.

Dorofée leaned a little towards the bowed head. "Don't you see how the sort of thing you are doing to Paula disfigures a woman?" she urged gently—and the words had an odd, quoted ring to Templewaite. "Don't you see, from your man's point of view, how being alone—a married woman deserted, flung aside by her husband—would disfigure her? Isn't all this love you've said you had for Paula big enough to keep her from that disfigurement? Think"—the little voice grew infinitely soft (ah, was it not human

at that moment? not, oh spirits of Truth, wholly subtle?)—"she's parted her hair again. She looks just a girl."

Guy Templewaite's brown face was working; struggling under the insistence of that understanding voice.

"And how proud she'd be of this new play being accepted! When she was a girl, when you were poor, and happy, and just starting out, how proud she used to be, do you remember? When you lived on bread and hard luck, mostly, and Paula thrived on it and loved you all the better—you remember? Mr. Templewaite, Paula's sick of the candy she's been eating since that beautiful time. She's sick, sick of it; she wants to come back to the old diet, hard luck and all. Wouldn't it—wouldn't it hurt you, far worse than your pride's hurt now, to know that you were standing in her way for ever?"

Guy's face had sunk into his hands. "How do you know she is ready to come back?" he asked indistinctly. "If she didn't send you, how do you know?"

"Because I know she's sick of the candy-pose. Because she's so sick of it, she told me all about it—all about it, and Michael and—and some other things she thought I didn't know (slowly);

she said if she was going to shed the pose—the Higher Soul and prose-poems and all the *insincere* things—she must tell me everything about them first. So she told me,” ended Dorofée, “and that’s how I know. Poor, beautiful, foolish Paula—whose little sins made you love her more, but whose big sin you can’t——”

“Mrs. Sargent,” Guy jerked his head up desperately, “I can’t stand this. I can’t stand it. I’m going to get Paula. I’ll—I’ll take her back if she’ll come, but—you’re sure she’ll come?” He was walking up and down the room with great tumultuous strides.

“She’ll come,” said Dorofée briefly. But in her voice—her new voice that even yet made Templewaite start occasionally with surprise—there was that of tremendous insinuation that assured him. She did not have to add that Paula had said she would come, crawling on her knees; her voice said it all—or just as good.

“All right.” Guy stopped in his striding up and down, to look at the beautiful little face with a curious confidence. “I may be playing the easy fool, but you—somehow you talk right and wrong as though you know more about them than I do, Mrs. Sargent.”

Across the fine, superacute features there

flashed a strange light—uncanny, Guy felt it, watching her. “Do you think that?” asked the low voice that he could scarcely believe belonged to little Mrs. Sargent; “tell me something, Mr. Templewaite—you’re a playwright, a psychologist—you must be sensitive to such things: should you say I had a conscience?”

“I should say,” he looked at her puzzled—what psychologist or any other creature could ever understand her as she was?—“you had a conscience and something much better; I should say you had a heart.” Which is more than I thought you had, he added to himself.

“A heart,” Dorofée repeated, “that’s—surely that’s human, isn’t it?”

“Very human,” still watching her, perplexed.

“And a conscience—you think I have them both,” she looked peculiarly serene; “well—I haven’t. That’s crude to say, isn’t it? And stupid? But it’s true. I have never had either a conscience or a heart, Mr. Templewaite, do you know that? No. I have had—just a brain—and a body.”

Guy stared. Sat down again. For the moment, in his interest, he had almost forgotten his own tremendous decision, and Dorofée’s part in it.

"Do you believe in dreams," went on the woman he had always wanted to probe, but could not, "do you believe in the reality of dreams? I do."

"H—m. I don't know—certainly there are cases where the subconscious mind becomes so highly sensitized——"

"Exactly. If a person has lived for days, weeks say, only in dreams, if the waking hours are just pose, and the actual, the *natural* life is only when that person goes into the unconscious—I mean really the subconscious, for that must be what such existence is—then (the grey eyes dilated to an intensity that half frightened Guy) the happenings, the sayings, the *truths* of a dream may be the truth itself. *I know it.*" All of a sudden she laughed lightly. "Do you think I'm quite mad?"

"I think you doubtless have been," returned Guy, seriously, "or very close to it. Just now you are probably saner than you ever were in your life."

She glanced at him sideways—narrowly. "I am. But why? How do you know? Because I come here and plead with you to take back Paula?"

"Because you come here and admit that you're

pleading. Mrs. Sargent, that has always been the thing that has made me uncomfortable with you—as we said, you might as well not pretend, but—you always did.”

“Well, I don’t now,” said she, almost brusquely. “I tell you the truth: I’ve been a devil and a pervert and a freak—all three in one, and—was I successful! (For an instant the old egoism flitted across her face, only to leave it drawn and very pale.) “No,” slowly—oh, so slowly, “I thought I was; in the moments when I lived, *myself*, I was drunk with what I thought my success. It went to my head; it—you are right—it unbalanced me. So that I thought the real the unreal; and the impossible the truth and the all-beautiful. Ah, but I paid”—the low voice dragged drearily—“I paid, I tell you.”

He regarded her pitifully. “I am sure you did,” he said with gentleness; “you couldn’t have got a heart if you hadn’t.”

“But I haven’t a heart,” she shook her head, “nor a conscience, nor any of those wonderful *subtle* things.”

Guy started. “You know that they are subtle then—the big universal things?”

“I know they’re all the subtlety there is,” said Dorofée, her eyes burning like smoking ashes;

steadily, heavily. "I know that they're all there is worth struggling for; and that if you haven't them, you're a joke!" Her breath caught with a sharp terror almost. "A joke! But"—the eyes narrowed to the slit-like shrewdness of an oriental's—"Mr. Templewaite, I'm going to get those things—those wonderful crude, human things—if I have to be the biggest joke that ever was, to get them! I'm going to get them if it costs my pride, my egoism—egoism!" with a short laugh, "*that's* a joke, for me to have any—if it costs my humour then, and that has been the most precious thing of life to me, always——"

"Ah!" The playwright scrutinized her still more interestedly.

"If I have to come back and live nine lives, like Simon," with a faint smile, "*I am going to have those human things—that subtlety.* And you," she rose, held out her hand with a charming change of tone—a pretty graciousness, "have helped me to commence. I thank you."

Guy took the hand, looked down at it—lying so tiny, so appealing it seemed in his big brown paw—and for some absurd reason, felt a lump come into his throat. He cleared it. Then he said, why he could not have told to save his life, "And your husband?"

Dorofée smiled; that secret, small smile that he had never seen in a Western woman's face before. "My husband—you must forgive him," she said softly; "remember—it was my brain—only his body, that sinned against you. Will you remember that?"

"Your—your——?" He dropped her hand, puzzled again.

"Yes. I have explained to Paula. She will explain to you. Now I must go. You will come and get Paula this evening?"

"Yes—yes, of course," said Guy feverishly. "I—I suppose I need not see Sargent!"

"No"—slowly—"I shall arrange so that Michael is out. If you will come about five?" Dorofée was moving toward the door. "And—I want to beg your pardon now," she turned back to him with a quick illuminating smile, "I don't think you're a coward at all. I see that when you said you loved Paula above everything else on earth, you spoke the truth. Good-bye, Mr. Templewaite, and again—thank you!"

She gave him her hand once more, for an instant; then swiftly she walked down the corridor and left the hotel. Guy Templewaite gazing after her, shook himself—baffled. He had thought he knew something of women, but——!

An enigma; who called herself a devil and a pervert and a freak all in one, yet who vowed that she was going to gain a heart and a conscience, and every subtle human thing—who knew enough to know that they were subtle! And who, looking like the Spirit of Beauty herself, came there and pleaded with him to take back his wife, to forgive her (Beauty's) husband, his wife's lover, because *she*—the lovely roseleaf thing—had been the brain, the force that moved them both to sin! It was grotesque, it was unbelievable. But—one thing was believable, remembered Guy, with a twinge of feeling, bitter-sweet: Paula was coming back. Guy Templewaite's expression, as he went back up to his rooms—their rooms—held something strangely serene.

Meanwhile Dorofée was walking on down the hill, searching carefully for a yellow sign she had seen, just once. Past the boulangerie, past the Café des Zouaves, past the girls' school and the little *poste*—ah! there it was—Café du Soleil, painted in hard, shining, yellow letters over a narrow restaurant building, near the town. Dorofée walked quickly towards it, her clear cheeks not quite so white as before.

The place in the morning looked dead enough. But a fat, greasy-looking proprietor was sweeping eggshells and piles of dirty confetti from under the rusty black leather seats—evidently it had not been dead the night before.

"Have you a girl here called Amande?" Dorofée from the door asked, rather timidly.

The man scowled darkly. "Yes, she is here, *l'ingrate!* But to-morrow I am sending her away. All the officers they come here to see her, and she—she spits at them. She will have none of them. Oh yes, I shall send her away. A café is no place for Amande, she ought to be on a throne!"

"I think you are right," said Dorofée gravely. "May I see her?"

"But yes, Madame"—the man moved his greasy bulk out of the doorway, staring curiously. A lady coming to the Café du Soleil!—and to see Amande, a half-caste 'waitress,' a dancing girl!—"if Madame would give herself the pain to sit while I call Amande—*l'obstinate!*" he muttered between his teeth, rage again getting the upper hand as he shambled off toward some rickety stairs.

Dorofée looked at the black leather seats—and preferred to stand. In a few moments Amande came down, her patron close behind her

to stand listening greedily to every word of the conversation that followed.

When Amande saw her former mistress, she trembled slightly. There was only one thing she had come to associate with that baby-sweet face, those great round eyes—no matter how both face and eyes might apparently have altered: suffering. Amande's face, as she stood before her, took on that expression of endurance, seen only in the eyes of those humans who have learned to bear torture dumbly, like animals. Dorofée, the joke, the freak, envied her that expression.

"Amande"—Dorofée noticed that even in a week the girl was painfully thin. Yet still there was that same haughty grace of the slim shoulders, that same royal carriage of the proud small head—"Amande, Monsieur tells me you are leaving here to-morrow?"

"Yes, Madame." It was the old, silently enduring answer.

"Where had you intended to go?"

"I do not know, Madame—into the street, I suppose;" at the dull answer, Monsieur, always standing by, rubbed his fat hands and smiled benignly. She would learn, the duchess, *hein?*

"I see." The little lady in grey spoke quickly—as though some one whom she feared was over-

hearing. "Would you like to come back to the palace, Amande? Monsieur and I are going to America," she added hastily, as Amande's pale cheeks flooded with crimson, "but we want to leave the house open, and (she took a little step forward) we want to leave it with a housekeeper whom we can trust. Would you like to come and take care of the palace, Amande?"

"*Madame!*" Amande had fallen on her knees, snatched Dorofée's hand with a little sobbing cry; behind that cry there was a piteous appeal—not to suggest this plan of heaven, only to use it for new torture.

"Then it is settled." Dorofée heard the appeal and winced at it; yes, it was true, she winced. "And you must come to-morrow—as early as she can (she turned to the patron) because we are sailing the next day, and there are many things I must tell you about; that I must leave in your care. So——" she looked with a strange satisfaction at the radiant face raised now worshipfully to her.

The patron had ceased to rub his hands and stood gaping. Amande, housekeeper at a palace—a person of position, *sacré bleu!* He must have another look at the girl!

"Madame is kind like an angel," the girl was

saying in a rich low tone, "Madame shall see that—that I will be truly faithful."

"I am sure of it," answered the small voice almost faintly—the voice belonging to those tiny hands that had come from behind and pushed—Amande as well as Paula.

"Monsieur—and Madame—will be in America a long time?" faltered Amande, as Dorofée turned to go.

"I do not know," the little lady looked thoughtfully at her, "perhaps yes; for a very long time. Monsieur's mother is ill. I do not know though—why, do you not like to stay alone?"

"Madame," the girl's wonderful dark eyes melted into the pale grey ones, "yes. It is better that I should stay alone," she finished very simply. "Madame, I will be your slave—I will do anything to repay——"

"There!" Dorofée released herself from the clinging hands as though she were suddenly, unbearably oppressed. "Say no more; it is arranged. *Au revoir*, then, Amande. *Bon jour, Monsieur.*" And like that, abruptly, she was gone.

Repaying—Amande would be truly faithful (the dark eyes had added 'this time'!) Dorofée, flying down the street, bit her childish lip until it

bled, an ugly wound. Subtlety! Satire! yes, she was knowing it: and just a little more intimately than she had ever known it before. She went into the house like a whirlwind, almost knocking down tall Akmed, who stood in his favourite place beside the fountain, singing a little tune.

"Pardon, madame!" The little whining tune stopped, and Akmed with his most impressive bow stood aside. "Madame was perhaps looking for Monsieur? Monsieur is in the garden—he said I should tell Madame."

"Yes. Thank you. Akmed!" The pale grey eyes looked up at the Arab fixedly.

"Yes, Madame?" Since his finding of a twisted silver crucible yesterday morning in the garden—bent, almost buried underneath the honeysuckle vines that clustered up around a certain window—Akmed had addressed his mistress only in French. Nor had he endeavoured to restore the crucible. He was an Arab. And his fathomless dark eyes rested now as tranquilly, as acceptingly, on the simple grey-gowned figure, as they had on the beribboned doll, on the veiled Arab woman.

"Akmed, Amande is coming back," said the even little voice, the eyes always regarding him,

"to-morrow, to be here while monsieur and I are away. I desire that Amande shall *stay* here, you understand. Amande shall *stay* here while we are away. She—will have no suggestion—no—ah—*persuasion* to go anywhere else, even for a day."

"Madame, I understand," said Akmed almost monotonously. "Amande is to stay here. I understand, Madame."

"That is good. You helped our guest with her boxes this morning, yes? That is well. You"—as she was passing on toward the garden, Dorofée turned back and looked at him again; but differently—"you are a good servant, Akmed. When I am in America, I shall miss you."

Akmed bowed profoundly, gravely—though always his white teeth formed a dazzling smile. "If I have pleased Madame, I am pleased." Though said in French, it was an Arab phrase. Dorofée started slightly; then hurried on out into the garden.

Michael came to meet her eagerly. Their bearing toward each other brought a passing whimsical gleam into the woman's appreciative eyes. Husband and wife, they met as two slightly acquainted creatures, subconsciously a bit distrustful (he of her, she of herself), yet fasci-

nated; each by the new possibilities unfolding in the other—and perhaps?—in themselves.

“You’ve been gone an awful time,” Michael said, placing her chair in the shadiest spot of the arbour, taking her hat, finding her a footstool: all at once, with the feverish consideration of man for beauty new-discovered. “I wanted to tell you about the cable—I had one from Sis, and she says everything’s going all right, only they want us to come just the same.”

“Us?” Dorofée leaned back, closed her eyes, in the cool shade of the wistaria. “Surely they didn’t say they wanted me?”

“Yes, they did,” repeated Michael stubbornly; he had taken a seat as near her as he could get. “That was the way the cable read: ‘we want you both to come, as soon as possible.’ Well, that’s to-morrow. I mean the boat goes from here to-morrow.”

“H—m.” Dorofée sat there for some time in silence. So mother-in-law wanted her! It was rather neat, that; on the part of the grinning elf Outside. It put an edge on the going to America. “Then I suppose we must pack, Michael.”

“Yes—yes, I told Akmed to see about the trunks, but the lazy nigger—he just stands there in the sun all the time——”

Dorofée opened her eyes. "Why do you call Arabs niggers, Michael?" she asked, laying a little hand caressingly on his arm, so near.

"Well—I've always hated 'em, you know. But"—Michael caught the little hand and pressed it hard between both of his—"I won't call them that if you don't like it, Dorofée. I"—his breath came rather faster—"I'll do anything on earth that you want me to!" he said in a low voice, bending over her.

Again, under his eyes so close, she opened hers. "Yes, Michael?" the liquid voice trailed his name with strange seductiveness—the seductiveness a Western man rarely hears. "Then—like Arabs. They"—the grey eyes closed again—"they like me. And now tell me, have you seen Paula this morning?"

Michael straightened; as though awakened brusquely from a delightful dream. "No—that is, I tried to. I knocked at her door, and asked if there was anything I could do; but she wouldn't even come out and speak to me. Called 'no thank you,' and said she was very busy. Paula can't bear me, Dorofée," Michael looked away from the closed eyes uncomfortably. "I—I suppose I have been an awful cad to her."

"Of course you have," came from Dorofée

composedly, "I made you. But then Paula was a hateful cat to you; I made that, too. And all the time you fancied you were fathoms deep in love with each other—isn't that delicious, Michael? I mean"—checking herself swiftly—"don't you think it was rather funny?"

And I would have you know that Michael *laughed*. Yes, he did; with his heavy-footed Boston humour suddenly dancing a valse caprice, Michael looked at Dorofée and laughed.

"I say, but it was rather silly, wasn't it?" he added awkwardly enough, but—*naturally*, frankly, as though that was exactly the way he felt. "You—you did just about what you liked with us, didn't you, Dorofée?"

She sat up, suddenly straight, and looked at him. "I thought I did; but"—swaying a little towards him—"I'm just beginning to do what I like with you, Michael," softly. "And you?"

Michael bent almost roughly, and kissed her; a great many times. "I—I—you know I adore you!" he whispered against her curving scarlet mouth. "I—you can do anything you like with me, I—I'll only *kill* you, that's all." His arms were hurting her with their fierceness.

Dorofée looked up with the light of Heaven in her face. "Yes, do, Michael"—she said, in

that new low voice—"do, will you? That's what I want you to—*kill me!*" And this time she forgot to look beyond at that grinning imp of truth and cry 'you see!' Though always that warning—"your one hope of humanization"—dominated her, in the back of her mind, the moment had come when she forgot her mind entirely. It was, like an Eastern woman's, her master's.

"But, Michael," after a time she drew herself out of the tight circle of his arms, and sat free—though a little dazed, "how long shall we stay in America do you think? For ever—oh, no, not for ever, Michael! You know—though your mother does forgive us, and want us back, we—oh, Algiers is our home!" It was as though she pleaded for something by another name. "Algiers is our home—the place where we belong."

Michael looked at the white walls of the old palace that had seen—he shuddered imperceptibly. "Then you—you like this place?" he asked—as Dorofée had asked Paula. "You would like to stay here—to come back, I mean?"

"I—yes," she drew a great breath, avoiding his eyes; "it is as the Arabs say, the place where I died and was born. I," slowly, "I like that way they put the dying first; it makes better climax, don't you think so? Yes, Michael, let us stay here

—let us come back!” she threw her arms round his neck, there in the fragrant wistaria arbour, beseeching as though for her life, “let us, let us!”

It was just a beautiful woman, begging for a fancy to be granted—her pet fancy; it was just a very man, moved by her beauty to grant her anything: it was the human tableau! And (from that brain that watched behind) Dorofée realized it, and exulted.

“Yes,” Michael smiled at her, yielding as he always would, no matter to what power she developed the male in him—I mean in proportion to the male that she developed in him—“yes, then we shall come back. I’ll not close our accounts, as I’d thought I should. We’ve quite a lot of money in the bank, Dorofée—eight hundred thousand francs.”

“No!—then you shall take me down and buy me an emerald necklace—yes, you shall, yes, you shall, yes, you shall!” she had jumped up and was dancing about him, flushed, excited. “This very afternoon, at”—an idea seemed to come to her—“at five o’clock, you shall go and buy me an emerald necklace. I wore one once,” strangely, “and—I liked it. The emeralds were uncut. Do you hear, Michael?” catching his hand, “do you promise?”

The man laughed delightedly. "But of course I will!" Ah, to have a woman like this—a child that danced, a devil, a mystery that baffled, a siren that lured, lured, that was too soft, too utterly adorable to be a siren—to have this woman for one's wife——! It was intoxicating, it took one's wits. "You shall have anything on earth you want," said Michael a little thickly; "are you going up, now?"

"Yes. I must make myself tidy for lunch. You—you wait for me down here, won't you, Michael? And I'll bring Paula; yes, I'll bring Paula—in a few minutes."

She left him, disappointed, to wait for her in the arbour. "One must not go too fast," she told Simon upstairs, sinking down on to the white *chaise-longue*; "though to me, too, it is fascinating enough: those 'things of the body, which are a part of subtlety and therefore beautiful and above all human, and to be desired'! Human! And he thinks, Simon, that I want an emerald necklace—that I *want* it. *Dieu*, if only I did. I only know I ought to want it; that's as far as I've got, now—knowing what I ought to be; to be a human being and so subtle. But, ah, the discouragements of it!"—she leaned her head deep in her hands, and for a moment the beauti-

ful face looked old, and *afraid*—"it all seems easy to undo, *hein mon bijou?* It is easy—to tear away what one has built up, though by weeks of delicate labour. Yes, yes, that is not hard. But to start to build something quite new—something not of brain nor of body—something of spirit!" The tiny face turned toward the cat was haggard, yes, *afraid*. "Shall I ever arrive at it, Simon? Shall I ever accomplish it—that?" The two pairs of pale, pale eyes gazed into each other.

"Shall I get a conscience, a sense of duty and right and wrong—ah, Mr. Templewaite said I seemed to know more about right and wrong than he—I don't know them: I only use the words. My brain knows the words and uses them. But I don't feel what they mean! And shall I ever? Shall I ever cease to be—a *joke!* Become a human—a—and he thought I wanted an emerald necklace." Dorofée threw her arms over her head and laughed and laughed; "he thought, Michael did, that I *wanted* it! Shall I, Simon? Shall I ever want it?"

She peered into the inscrutable cat face agonizingly, her small features quivering in every muscle. But the Spirit of Silence looked back impenetrably: it gave no answer.

XII

"PAULA"—half an hour later Dorofée knocked at Paula's door and poked her small gold head inside—"oh, Paula, what do you think? Akmed's got sunstroke—he stood there in the court by the fountain too long, and Michael says he got a touch of the sun. Anyway he's had to give up and go to bed. And *of course* it's just the day!—cook's day off, and N'ala I let go to her cousin's nephew's funeral, and Akmed was to get lunch!" Dorofée and Paula regarded each other, for the first time in their lives, on a level. They were two women; and there was nobody to get lunch!

"I'm so very sorry, because you've been packing all morning and are tired," continued Dorofée, glancing about the room lined with trunks. "But—oh, why of course! how stupid of me—we'll go to a restaurant. Michael can take us in the car."

"No"—Paula came out of her room slowly—

the two had scarcely spoken together since yesterday morning, yet Paula's voice sounded quite a natural woman's voice, speaking to another woman about lunch—"don't go to a restaurant. I can cook—I used to always (still more slowly) when I was a girl—when I was just married. Why, I can cook, really, Dolly," and Paula's laugh was almost gay, "come on. I—I think it will be fun!"

Dorofée stood poised a moment—her mind too on tip-toe; and looking into Paula's, a little gleam—of an idea?—came into those eyes that were used to watching jokes. "Oh, it *will* be fun," quite spontaneously she caught Paula's hand and hurried with her along the passage, "and you can really cook, Paula? I think," was it enviously that she looked at Paula? "that it is *very* clever of you, cleverer even than prose-poems." The grey eyes stole a side glance at Paula.

"The prose-poems weren't much," said Paula briefly.

And Dorofée gave a little skip—yes, even in the grey gown; and so they came into the kitchen.

"There isn't so much we need cook, you know," the little figure stood in the middle of the low room, thoughtfully, "just tea, and perhaps some

eggs. Cook left a salad in the ice-box, and there's cold partridge and——"

"Oh, but I want to cook"—the prose-poetess was already in a remarkable red and yellow pinafore—in which she looked curiously more at home than in any sheath she possessed—"I know, Dolly: I'll make an *omelette soufflée*!" Somewhere—in that realm of natural woman things—the atmosphere sinister between Paula and Dorofée had vanished.

"Oh, *will* you, Paula? But—won't it fall, carrying it across the court?" Dorofée suggested timidly.

"Why carry it across the court? There's no one but just you and me—and Michael," Paula's full voice was rather low as it spoke that name, "just let's picnic in here, Dolly—why not? I—I think it would be *lovely* to lunch in the kitchen!" Yes, the parted hair had taken Paula back; to the diet of that prettiest girl, again.

Dorofée looked at her. "I'll just call Michael," she said, "I think it would be delicious. Michael shall help."

So it happened that the author of *Industries* sat five minutes later beating eggs under the direction of the goddess of the Higher Plane: both of them quite serious, and taken up with the busi-

ness in hand. The author also wore a pinafore—pink and brown stripe. The goddess was inclined to be severe.

“No—you don’t do it that way, Michael—look! Grab the bowl as though you weren’t afraid of it, and then *whack*, don’t you see?”

Michael whacked. The stuff splashed into his face, into his eyes, onto his collar; deluged him; and—Michael and Paula looked at each other over their pinafores and *laughed!* Laughed till the tears rolled down their cheeks—Michael’s very canary cheeks—shook, held their sides, and simply roared, laughing.

“Oh, Michael, I can’t help it! you—you look so f-funny!” Paula burst into a fresh paroxysm every time she tried to stop. “And that great ridiculous pinafore! Oh, Michael, I shall die—it’s too funny! If you could see your face!”

“Well, there’s some on yours too,”—Michael (from Boston) pointed with his spoon, while he laughed uproariously,—“I call this a pretty omelette! A——” His eyes fell on the face of his wife, standing at a little distance, watching, and laughing too—laughing and laughing. “I say, this is awfully funny,” the spoon fell from his hand, and Michael looked from one to another

of the two women wonderingly, almost frightenedly. "All—all three of us laughing together, you know!"

"Yes, all three of us laughing together," echoed Dorofée, panting for breath; then with a fresh outburst, "but isn't it *fun*? isn't it a—a howling joke, to laugh together!" and they were all off again—Michael and Paula not knowing why, but just unable to help it.

"Oh, dear! I really must stop now, or there'll be no lunch"—Paula dried her eyes, and straightened up from cook's squeakiest, most uncertain chair—"here, Michael, I'll do those eggs, and you make the tea. You can do that, I know, because——" She stopped short, with a flare of colour. It was at Villa des Fruits that Michael had made the tea.

"Certainly he can," put in Dorofée, "and here's a fresh pinnie for him." She buttoned him into it, the while weak from silent, racking mirth: all three of them laughing together! And Michael laughing at himself! "Now what shall I do, Paula?" Herself waiting directions from Paula, asking for them—Dorofée shook again; peeped slyly into the tea-pot. Surely that gnarled, grinning elf was somewhere about.

"Why"—Paula glanced up distractedly from

the yellow bowl—"you set the table. That is, get out the salad and the bird and things—we'll just eat off our laps, won't we? That's the way Guy and I—" she stopped short. That omelette seemed fated for disaster; but Paula began beating again—"the way we used to do on Sunday evenings when the boys came in," she finished quietly.

"Look here, Dolly, measure in this tea, won't you?" Michael was looking over the shoulder of his now blue and mauve pinafore, "my hands are so shaky, can't do a thing with it," he apologized as the little person came up and took the canister from him. And he looked at his hands, puzzled: there was something extraordinarily odd about this whole performance—he and Dolly and Paula getting lunch together in the kitchen, just like—like ordinary people, you know! There was something—something deucedly *funny* about it.

"There. That's enough." Dorofée ran off with the tea-canister. "Wait now, Michael, I'll help you," and she came back, to stand close beside him, like a guardian fairy; pouring hot water over the tea leaves—a thing that any woman might have done, but—"I wonder if I'm doing this thing right?" murmured Dorofée—to Mi-

chael or to some one beyond him?—"I wonder if this is the right way to do it?"

And he, looking down into her upturned eyes, wondered at the wistfulness in them. For he could recognize wistfulness, this man; all the simple, big emotions he could recognize. And if Paula had not been there, he would have caught Dorofée to him and reassured her there in his arms; but—"of course you're doing it right, dear," he said gently, as he would have to a child, had he had one. "Why not?"

"Why not?" she echoed a bit dully. "That's just it—why not? There, come, Michael," briskly once more, "everything is ready now; see, Paula's finished the omelette."

They sat down triangularly; Michael perched on a table, his plate between his knees—a glass of wine on one side, a partridge wing on the other; Paula flushed but smiling on the squeakiest chair; and Dorofée looking singularly at ease upon a worndown Arab stool. Dorofée began to crunch salad. "It's a nice party, isn't it?" she said like any child. "I'm rather glad Akmed got a touch of the sun, poor old thing!"

"So am I," chimed Paula, anxiously testing the omelette. "I think it's a lovely party. In New York"—she stopped, checked herself. What of

Dorofée's promise of the day before? Nothing more had been said between them; and her (Paula's) trunks sat upstairs, packed, waiting. To go where? "In New York we used to have parties like this every Sunday evening," finished Paula very slowly.

"You and Guy?" Dorofée looked up, the most natural way in the world.

"Guy and I and—the boys; the reporters on the paper, you know." Paula was going on—she did not know why—just because Dolly asked her, she supposed. "We had just a tiny scrap of a flat, and a much tinier scrap of a kitchen; but all the boys used to come on Sunday nights, and each one brought something. One time Freddy Smith brought *eels*—and then we'd make coffee—old Stokes made the coffee; poor old Stokie! he lost his job later, just when—when we had luck. Things go like that," she finished.

"Yes." Dorofée was looking at her, taking her in: this woman who spoke simply, of simple things: who sat in the despair of the depths, possessed of nothing (at least so she thought), having lost everything: eating an omelette she herself had made, and saying 'things go like that'!

Michael, too, was looking at Paula. He felt

an overwhelming rush of shame. What—*what on earth*—had got into him, to have made him such a cad with Paula? Then his eyes fell on Dorofée: she had got into him! In an instant he forgot all about Paula.

“Won’t you have this drumstick, Michael?” Dorofée, catching his eye—and its expression—asked him demurely. There, if *that’s* not simple! for some reason she looked over her shoulder. “And pour some more Chablis for Paula. We don’t want her last meal with us to be quite too bad, though we do make her cook it, and eat it in the kitchen!”

“Her last meal with us?” Michael glanced up questioningly. “Why, where’s she going? Where is Paula going?”

Yes, Paula’s eyes added, fixed on Dorofée, with a great suspense; where am I going?

“She is going—to have rather a wonderful time,” said Dorofée provokingly; screening her eyes that smiled from the two who looked to her for the future. “She is going—but wait and see!” And unconsciously—like a fun-loving young mother who keeps a surprise from her babies—yes, unconsciously to herself, Dorofée laughed: spontaneously, whole-heartedly. Michael wanted to pick her up and run away with her, when she

laughed like that; she was delicious. Wholly new to him.

She was new to Paula too, who regarded her doubtfully, rather distrustfully, as she suggested that they do the dishes.

"I'll wash," said Paula, "and you and Michael can wipe." Had Dolly seen Guy? Had he said that he—Paula got up abruptly, went over to the place where things were to be washed clean, and rolled up her sleeves. "I'll wash," she repeated with an odd smile.

And Dorofée allowed her. The grey eyes always watching, saw hope for themselves in that smile of Paula's; since the smile itself was of hope.

Paula's white hands swished through the steaming water as though they liked it. She set the shining glass before Michael, with absorbed care. Yes, the scrap of a flat and the poverty and the hard luck had been beautiful. She knew it now; and she would crawl on her knees to Guy to tell him so, she would remind him of——

"Take care, Michael, don't drop it," cautioned Paula suddenly. "It's very fragile, that piece you're holding."

"I know it is," returned Michael, frowning anxiously, "but I won't drop it. I'll be careful."

And behind their backs, the narrowed grey eyes gathered understanding; smiled faintly. Paula warning Michael to be careful; Michael promising Paula not to 'drop it'!

"There! we've got through that all right," encouraged Dorofée, "the most difficult part is over. Everything now will be as easy as breathing."

And to her delight, Michael and Paula echoed her; "as easy as breathing!" they said together; and then laughed, a little awkwardly.

When the dishes were finished, Paula turned to the other two with a queer constrained determination. "I just want to say," in a voice not altogether steady, "that though I'm going away—I—no matter where I go, I'm going, feeling everything's all right. It's—it's been this silly little party in the kitchen that——" Paula dashed her hand to her eyes, choked, and fled.

Michael looked at Dorofée; Dorofée was looking deep into Space. "I—I believe if Paula had a house, she'd be all right," Michael said, shifting on one foot, as he stood there in the kitchen door with his wife.

"She is all right," said Dorofée, almost like a promise; "don't forget that at five o'clock, Michael, you are to get me that necklace"—then, looking up, she became conscious of the kitchen

door. They were standing in it, a man and his wife, with pinafores on: Dorofée, with a low rippling laugh, put up her arms and kissed Michael.

At five o'clock, Dorofée stood in the room of the Favourites, tying Paula's veil. Paula's gloves lay on the dressing-table; Paula's linen coat was ready on a chair.

"So—that's very nice." Dorofée regarded her handiwork critically; "now run on down, Paula—he's waiting in the *salon*, and—good-bye."

Paula turned to her. The two women looked at each other for a long minute. Then, moving blindly, instinctively, as women do, they kissed. Dorofée as blindly as Paula. And "Do you think you can ever forgive me, Paula?" that, from the little person in grey, was not instinctive; that is, it was brain-instinctive. Some one, that grinning elf peeking always over her shoulder, told her she ought to say that—that she ought to want Paula to forgive her. "Do you think you ever can?" repeated Dorofée, her curving lips hard set, in the tremendous effort to be sincere.

Paula, whom she had tweaked about, a puppet, looked at her with a marvellous tenderness. The prose-poetess had vanished for ever; in her place

there was just a woman—who had plumbed the depths, the blacknesses of life, thanks to that one before her—and—who was glad! “I forgive you—why, Dolly, yes!” she cried softly. “Why should I not forgive? You say you did it all—took me away from my husband and made me lose all the things a woman lives for, but—you see, you’ve given them all back to me again. And—what I never had before with them: *the knowledge of what they are*—a man and his love! Dolly,” placing her long hands on the tiny creature’s shoulders, “I wouldn’t have had you not have done it—I wouldn’t have had you or any of it different, for all the world!” And Paula was crying a little, under her veil.

The one whom those spirits had mocked caught her arm, stern-faced. “You mean that?” she demanded. “You mean that you wouldn’t have had me different,—that if I had been different, you—a human—would not have gained this thing you’ve got? Do you mean it?”

“But of course,” Paula stopped crying to open her eyes wide. “I should have gone on being just a silly woman, having flirtations, and little tiffs with Guy, and trying all the time to be what I was not——”

Dorofée gasped; clutched her. “You mean

that too?" she almost screamed. "That I've helped you to being what you are? Is that true, Paula?"

"Why, yes," startled, "certainly it is. But why do you ask like that? Why do you look so queer?"

"Because I am queer," returned Dorofée grimly, yet with a certain triumph in her low voice. "Always I've been queer; I'm just beginning to want to be something else. Always I've been what I'm not—do you understand? I've been"—the low voice had the timbre of thin silk, strained taut—"a freak, a—a joke; but now—if I've helped you to be what you are, why surely (the little drawn face lighted to radiance) I can help myself to be it. I can be it. There, Paula, run along, run along," pushing her swiftly toward the door, "don't worry about me: I'm going to be all right. All right. And you"—with an excited thrill in her voice—"you are going to your man! Good-bye, Paula!"

Again they kissed, silently. And Paula moved away downstairs, with hurried, uneven steps; her face the face of Paradise regained.

Dorofée went into her own room, and closed the door.

"I helped her to be what she is," she repeated,

slowly—exultantly; “I may have failed with myself, I may have been crude with myself, but I was subtle with her. You know I was,” not to Simon, but to some one beyond, in that ether that had shook with hooting of her; “you can never deny me that. And Michael—if I had let him alone, what would he have been? A namby-pamby scholar person, bent over a volume of *Industries*, dabbling with an occasional tepid love affair!—interesting, eh?” the small face looked almost furious in its irony. “You’d have said that was human, and so subtle, I suppose? Well, I wouldn’t. I’d have said it was just plain dull. Whereas now”—the little face lighted to its radiance of supernatural—“I find Michael *wonderful! A man*. Would he have had those lines in his face, those scars of defeat and strength, if it hadn’t been for me—for my freakiness? No. Would he have known how to be savage and brutal and compelling and divinely tender—all the *man* things—if I hadn’t made him and his brain go through torment? No. He may be weak, he may have no conscience—yet—but at least I’ve remade him more splendid as a man thing; more like me as a living, vibrating organism. If you say I’ve been inane, and got nothing out of it all, why—I’ve got *that!* I’ve got a

creature who can break me with his little finger—and would, in a minute, if I resisted him! And if I'd left him alone, as he was—Pah! do you think a woman wants to be married to some Principles?" In the Space into which she gazed, burningly, stormily, the shadows seemed to flit away. Only her inalienable Spirit of Silence remained with her.

And him she caught up, almost naturally—she had scarcely to remember to do it—and hugged. "You know"—she whispered ecstatically against the soft blue-grey fur, "you know—me."

The Spirit of Silence gazed back. It did not say what it knew.

"And you know Michael," went on the low, Eastern woman's voice; "you know what he was and—what he is; for you were here—yesterday. And there are no secrets from you. Listen—what's that? Ah, Michael! with the necklace, I wonder? Yes, yes, come in"—Dorofée jumped up from the floor where she had been sitting, and went to the door. What would he have brought? Something with diamonds?—some modern thing set in platinum? It was interesting, this first present of his to her—since.

Michael caught her up in his arms—swept her off her feet, and held her a moment against

his quick-beating heart, before he put her down and gave it to her: it was in a yellow Arab box. It felt heavy.

"I knew how you liked Arab things," he said eagerly, "so I went directly to Natouch," mentioning a famous native jeweller in the Casbah, "and by rare good luck, he had the very thing! Look, Dolly, wasn't it odd, Natouch just got it the other day—he said he had sold it to Barali, that Arab whom you liked, you know, and that Barali for some strange reason had taken a sudden dislike to it—had sent it back to be sold. So"—he spread it out before her, heavy, lustrous, barbarically magnificent—"here it is!"

Dorofée took it up in her tiny fingers; let it fall again, looked at it.

"Why, don't you like it?" cried Michael, crest-fallen. "I thought it'd be the very thing you'd like—I thought I couldn't get anything that would please you better."

Dorofée twined her arms up round him, her canny eyes half shut. "And you couldn't," said she strangely; "you couldn't, if you had searched Algiers all over, have found anything that would have pleased me better. Do you know why?"

"No"—Michael, though he held her close, looked bewildered. "Why, no—why?"

"I told you I wore one once—an emerald necklace; well—it was this one."

"Dorofée!" All the insinuation did not reach Michael just at once; his cry was mostly surprise.

"Yes"—the little fingers played with it again—"this one. I wore it," interestedly, almost excitedly the grey eyes watched his face, "when it was Barali's."

"Dorofée, what are you saying? what do you mean?" Michael had put her down; sprang up, his whole attitude a question mark of suspense. "Tell me this instant"—his handsome face grew darker and darker as he waited; as provokingly she let him wait.

"Why you see, Michael"—a long, tantalizing pause, while Dorofée from under her lashes looked at him, and played with Simon's ears—"that day I thought was my next to last, when I had planned to have you murder me, you know——"

Michael gave a smothered exclamation.

"I was very bored. It seemed to me that—as some one said afterward," Dorofée's voice lagged a little, "I was getting nothing out of it, my plan, except—a laugh, rather an inane laugh. So—when you and Paula were shut up in the study, I—went to Barali."

"What?" Michael caught her wrists, held her there on the *chaise-longue* as in a vice. "You dare to tell me this?" came his voice, strange to her, new in its low fury, its unwonted strength. "You tell me that voluntarily—of your own free will, as a caprice, you—went to Barali—to a nigger? Answer!" His fingers were leaving red prints on her arms.

As once before, she looked down at those fingers almost caressingly. She did not try to release herself by an inch. "But certainly it was of my own free will," looking up at him with a little smile, "though hardly as a caprice. No; I had made up my mind in the beginning that I should go. When first I hit upon that plan. I had always intended to go, ever since we talked together at the masque last winter; and he told me to."

"He told you to—the dog! I'll teach him!—just let me find him, let me get my hands on him, and I'll teach him! An Arab—a dirty nigger——"

"Michael," she murmured remindingly, "you promised me not to call them——"

"Niggers?" He laughed an ugly laugh. "Well, I take it back then. And for you—you"—drawing her to her feet and holding her

there, while his face grew positively livid—"you delicate white thing, you fragile lovely woman thing to have gone to—ah, God!" His hands tightened round her arms till she set her lips with the pain of them. "It makes me see red—it makes me see red!"

Dorofée regarded him; was it exultation in the screened eyes? "You are very angry, aren't you, Michael?" said she; "that is nice; that is very nice."

"Angry?" Of a sudden he dropped her arms, stood away from her, white as death. "Nice? You say it is nice? My God, Dorofée, what are you?"

"I don't know," she returned slowly; "but—I think, a woman who is trying to get a conscience: that is why I told you—about the necklace."

"Why you——?"

"Yes. A woman, an ordinary *human* woman would have told, wouldn't she? If her husband brought her a thing like that, and she wanted to be—honest and sincere and all those things with him, wouldn't she have told?" Eagerly, impatiently, the low voice asked it.

"Of course she would. But how does that alter things? How does that make it any better? Can't you see I'm in hell, Dorofée? For the

love of pity, if you've anything to say about this ghastly thing, say it! I—this week has been too much for me.” And Michael sank down, worn out, into the nearest cool white chair.

Then the little creature whose wrists bore those red marks, came and knelt on a stool beside him; like an Eastern woman. And she took one of his nervous brown hands in both her tiny ones, and said—in the sweetest, softest voice in the world, “but it was nothing, Michael—do not be disturbed; it was nothing.”

“Nothing?” Michael almost shouted.

“No. Listen: I was fond of Arabs; I had talked with Barali at the masque, and he interested me; he told me if ever I wanted to become truly an Arab woman, I should come to him—no, no, Michael, sit quiet. I tell you there was nothing. So—when the time came that I thought I had only one day more—I went. I went to Barali's house, and put on Arab clothes, yes!—but I had put them on before, often before. Still—this time it was different.”

Michael was leaning forward, away from her, his features strained, in torture.

“I put on Arab clothes, and I sat by Barali and smoked, and (as I told you) confessed. I told him all myself, *except*—the plan; and do you

know what he said? At the end when I had finished, he said, 'You are like a sheik who wears a garment of two colors: one side scarlet, the other pale grey. You have never been able to decide which is the more to your liking.' "

"Well?" Michael could bear very little more. His breath came in quick leaps. "Well—well?"

"It was true what he said. Even then—I thought I had decided for the grey—for ever—and then, just that last day, I had to change over to the scarlet again. You see," she straightened with a sudden triumph, "I was a *woman*: I had to change my mind! I went over to the scarlet, yes. Or I intended to. But Barali's father—the marabout—came, just as I had finished the confession, and—as I told you, there was nothing. I came away. If you do not believe me, there are Arabs—a woman—who will tell you."

Michael drew a deep breath. Sat back, looked at her for an instant, all distrust. He looked at her: the little exquisite woman thing, sitting there at his feet, curled there like an Eastern woman, with an Eastern woman's languor in her pose, in her eyes—the rage that had turned to ice in him, melted, was swept away like an avalanche: he snatched her up, and buried his face in the shining hair. "Dorofée, Dorofée—I love you! I've got

to believe you—you can tell me anything—make me anything. I love you!" A great sob tore his voice.

The woman in his arms reached up and laid her lips on his—human lips, trembling, ardent. "Michael"—she said, curiously—as though saying it to some one else too—"Michael, I shall make you just my man—my human; part of me, —ah! yes! my most subtle part. Are you not giving me what Barali was not allowed to? Where is it? I want it—the emerald necklace; yes, yes, I want it! It is true, I want it!"

And breaking away from Michael, she ran to fetch it from the table, and bade him clasp it round her neck.

"Now you know why Barali did not like it," said she in a low, tremulous tone; "but do you know why I like it? And will you like it too, Michael?"

The man gazed at her, unutterably happy, though he did not know why. The barbaric gleaming thing round her neck—the thing that had been Barali's—no, he did not hate it. But why did he not? "I don't know," he said uncertainly, "I don't know."

The grey eyes, now dark, dilated with understanding, a vision that he could not follow, reas-

sured him, victorious. "But you will know," promised Dorofée softly. "You will learn to love that necklace. Ah, Michael, but you were angry," she went back, ecstatically, glorying in it, "you were in a rage—you were wonderful! And if you were to murder me now"—the dark eyes lengthened—"that would be wonderful too."

"Don't!" he hid his face against her, miserably. "Don't, Dorofée! Can't you see how horrible it all was?"

"No"—once more the little voice lagged,—*"no (truthfully), I cannot see that it was horrible; but I can see that it seemed horrible, that it seems horrible now—to a person with a conscience."* Then she looked up at him, with a dazzling smile. "Michael! Michael! why you have a conscience, you must have one or you couldn't feel that!"

"A conscience?" repeated Michael, dazedly, "why—why of course—I suppose I have. But what of that?"

"You didn't have," slowly, "or at least if you had, you were unconscious of it. But now—ah!" she gazed far, far into that Space that was always about her, "you cannot say that I have not begun. You cannot taunt me with—Michael (catching

his eyes fixed, troubled, upon her), do you know that I have sent Paula back to her husband?"

"No! Dorofée!"

"Yes. He came for her this afternoon while you were out. And I have been to get Amande; she will be here as housekeeper while we are away. And I have told you about Barali, and—Michael, you see, don't you?" The little voice pleaded piteously. "I have done all I can—all that a woman with a conscience could do, to make up—haven't I, Michael?"

When she appealed for pity, for tenderness, the man was not perplexed. No. He gathered her close to him; caught her up off the low stool and held her in his strong man's arms. He did not say a word, except—very low, against her hair, "I love you. Dorofée, I love you."

But Dorofée was assured. The grinning elf that peeped at her from behind every chair, from round every corner, must be assured—that she had done all that a human woman could. And so—she took a human woman's reward; that, at least, with a mad sincerity, delight. She turned to her man, and closed her eyes.

XIII

DOROFÉE in her travelling cloak—a scarlet cloak—stood in the garden. “But I am coming back,” she tried to tell herself convincingly. Though something—she knew not what—within herself, denied her. The garden was as gaily French as ever; the bluets as blue, the œillets as pink, the heliotrope and honeysuckle as fragrant and profuse; and the deep-hanging wistaria as falsely thick in concealment. It had been a pretty stage; it had played its part; even to—she glanced at the specially thick clump of honeysuckle underneath her window—the burial scene.

And the resurrection? came to Dorofée hauntingly. Where the mad brain had gone down, beaten; where the wild body had stolen out to be beaten also—by a marabout, a prophet of the most inexorable of religions—would there rise—a spirit? “I am coming back,” repeated Dorofée, mechanically, aloud; “mother-in-law, yes! you must allow us—when you see how I have remade Michael—subtler than the cleverest, that I am not even jealous of his subtlety—you will allow him

to bring me back: a spirit—a conscience, who knows?" A spirit even then was following her—the Spirit of Silence, noiseless, inalienable. "Ah, I shall always have you," she picked the great cat up, looked into his pale eyes steadily, "I shall always have you, Simon, *mon bijou*—is it not so? Now you must get into your basket; it is nearly time to go."

"But I am coming back," she said, when Amade, by the little plashing fountain, wept and begged her to return. "I am coming back, yes, Amade. And here is something for you"—she held Amade a small square box, a jeweller's box—"yes, take it, it belongs to you. It is yours."

And Dorofée left the weeping girl and the little fountain that laughed, and went out to get into the car with Michael and the basket that held Simon.

"But I am coming back," she persisted, all the way on that drive to the dock; as they passed the café where the girl with jewels in her hair had sat, flipping cigarette ashes into the officer's face; as they passed the coffee house where a curious closed mouth had called attention to itself, with its outcrying muteness; as they passed the mosque—the Great Mosque, where— Just then down the narrow street dashed a high yellow cart drawn

by two splendid Arab blacks, driven by—she drew in her breath sharply—yes! By Barali; for the veriest instant beside them, for the length of a horse's dash, his statuesque dark face searching hers, his piercing eyes snatching at the scarlet cloak,—opposite the Mosque, the place where the Arab woman had made her marriage confession.

Dorofée stole a glance at the man beside her. He was as statuesque, as dark almost as the Arab who had passed. He gave no sign. Mentally, she clapped her hands: ah, he was learning, this re-made Michael! They could not say she had not made him even more subtle than he was, for he showed what he was, by not showing it. The quibble delighted her. And they would come back—yes, *they*—he and she would come back.

At the dock Akmed left them. It was just a little freighter they were having to take to Gibraltar, but as usual in Algiers, quite a crowd of Arabs were gathered on the wharf; it would not be safe for Akmed to leave the car. A porter took the luggage, Michael the basket that held Simon; and Dorofée turned to Akmed.

"Good-bye, Akmed," said she, speaking involuntarily in Arabic, "Allah protect you—*inshallah.*"

With his unvarying serene tranquillity, Akmed

looked at her. Almost lazily he replied, "Allah be with thee, oh rose of gold, and with thy lord. And when the Arabs in the Casbah ask for thee, how shall I call thee? What name shall I use?"

She looked up, hesitated a moment. "What name?" Then suddenly a light flashed across her face; the light of an odd whimsical fancy. "Call me 'Gift of a Fairy,' " said she delightedly. "I have just thought—that is what my name in French means! The gift of a fairy"—and dreamy with the significance of it, she moved away on to the ship.

Arabs huddled into their burnouses crowded round it; she gazed at them, while Michael left her for a moment to go below. Then she gazed back of them, at the jagged pink and white city, strung along glaringly brilliant in the noontide sun. The rows of arcades and gaudy little shops, all plainly to be seen from the stern where Dorofée stood, seemed to mock, and to cry, "We don't care, go along, we don't care." They were French, the arcades and the shops. Up higher, where the beaten-down plaster houses, the rows of worn-down steps, the balconies with the windows like lidless eyes, huddled close together in one scorching arid *bombe*,—seemed to come like a moaning shriek "Allah! his Rose we are losing!

Allah—al—Allah, give back!" The bare houses huddled; the cloaked faces huddled: to shut in, to shut in, to shut in.

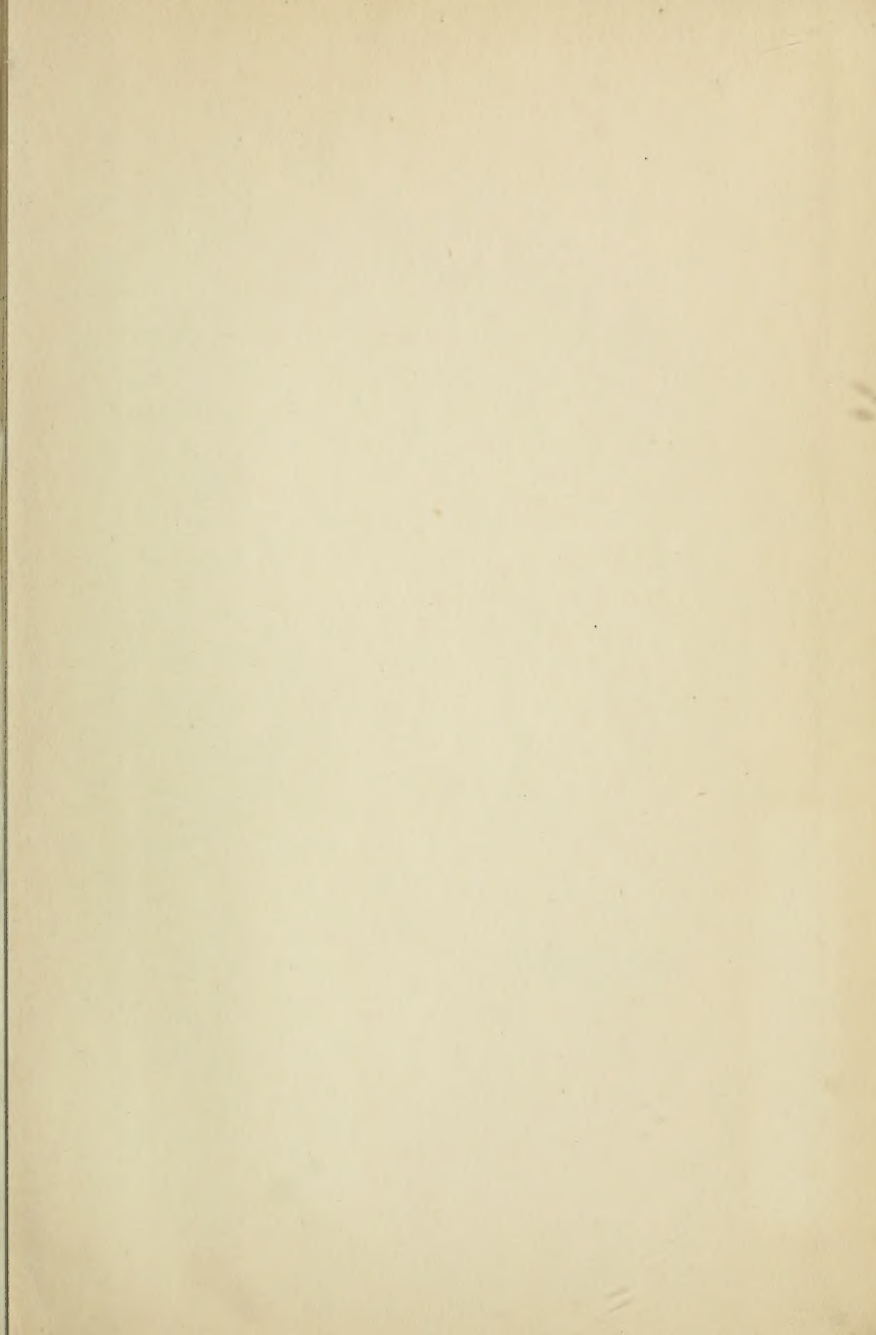
"But I am coming back," insistently, frantically she called to them; "I am coming back."

A whistle blew shrilly. And, slowly, the little French boat pulled away. And the wee scarlet speck of a person, with her pale eyes gazing, gazing from the stern, caught sight suddenly of one face she could recognize—could remember through the rest of her life. It was the lighter face of a Persian, one who sat on the breakwater, sunk into his burnous, with a curly white dog by his side. The ship was very close to the breakwater; the eyes within the burnous met the grey ones from the stern. The mouth of the Persian was shut.

EPILOGUE

A VERY terrible old lady lay in a very stately four-poster bed, regarding the bent golden head of some one who sat beside her, reading. It was a long time that the low, liquid voice read on; a long time that the old lady from her throne of pillows watched. At last, with difficulty, she leaned over and closed the book upon the childish knees. "My dear," she said abruptly, "I want to beg your pardon. I was wrong. I said you would ruin Michael, but you have made him—remade him, sweeter and—yes, stronger. And you encourage him to remain here in America near me. I can see that you are a good woman, a woman of conscience." The little cloudy-gold head bent lower; before the infantile red lips opened to reply, a long questioning look went out from under that soft hair, to a ball of grey-blue fluff in the window. The pale ash-grey eyes met the look unblinkingly. And Simon, the great cat, ran his tongue along his whiskers as though he smiled. But the Spirit of Silence answered nothing.





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